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AUGHTY NAN

JOHN LUTHER LONG

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NAUGHTY NAN

"ME TOO!"

NAUGHTY NAN

BY

JOHN LUTHER LONG

AUTHOR OF "MADAME BUTTERFLY," "THE PRINCE OF ILLUSION," "THE POST-WOMAN," "MISS CHERRY-BLOSSOM,"

With Frontispiece

LONDON
WARD, LOCK & CO., LIMITED
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TO

HIM WHO DOTH A GOOD THING FOR ANOTHER—

'T WILL HELP HIM DO IT BETTER FOR HIMSELF.

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I

MY SAVAGE AUNT IZZY

AUNT IZZY (her name is Isabella) sent for me in haste, and in haste I arrived. She embraced me breathlessly. Then, too late, I remembered that she did everything breathlessly.

I deliberately went to the mirror and perfected my tie. Then I returned to my aunt with an air of saying:

"Now, then, having calmed *you*, I am at your service."

She at once reclaimed her interrupted embrace.

"Oh, Jock, what do I care for—your necktie!"

"I quite understand, aunt dear," I comforted; "never mind it."

My aunt reeked with patchouli. I tried subtly, without violence, to withdraw from her embrace. It was in vain. I had to accomplish it by diplomatic degrees.

"And as for haste! You could not have come too fast."

"Haste in a dear aunt breeds haste in a worthless nephew," I answered with a gallantry which failed. My aunt merely regarded me hostilely. However, at this point I got out of her arms.

"Stop it! You don't think me 'dear.' And I don't think you 'worthless.' And that is just it."

"Yes. But what?"

"*You* are good!" quoth she. And then, as if she had gone too far, "to come—er——"

"Running," I laughed. "I shall say nothing—I

trust I shall *do* nothing—to destroy the pleasing illusion concerning both my piety and my gait." I could not fancy where she got it: that I was good!—that I liked to run!

"And *I* am good."

I bowed.

"Strange that she is—*not* exactly—poor thing!"

I wondered who could have resisted our joint example.

"Well—perhaps less good than *we*," I agreed, saying as much for the anonymous culprit as I thought my aunt would permit.

"There are no degrees of goodness!"

"I thought there were, dear aunt. Good—better—best. Good—bad—worse. Don't you think every one is more or less good?"

"Then, I suppose you would say that the same people are also more or less bad?" She nearly snarled it!

"Exactly. I think we are all both bad and good. No one knows precisely the proportions——"

"Till something happens!"

My aunt triumphed in this.

"Yes," I had to admit, "then the preponderance is likely to appear."

"And it *has* happened."

"And you have discovered that the anonymous she is *more* bad than good?"

But at this my aunt curiously baulked.

"I wish you had not said it that way—or said it at all. To *think* it isn't as bad as to say it. It's horrid! No! She is not—*bad!* It's a nasty word!"

"Ah, I see."

My aunt did not answer me. I think, indeed, that she did not hear me. Often my speech seemed too frivolous for her serious attention. In such cases I kept silence until I could observe her bent—and follow it—like the time-server I am.

"And we must save her!" she cried, very suddenly.

"Certainly," said I. "Who?"

"*Her!*" cried my aunt, tragically "Haven't I told you?"

"No. The cook? I'll call the police. It's their duty to save people."

My levity evoked no levity in return. My aunt tiptoed to the portière. Then she floated mysteriously back to me.

"She is out. I heard her go. Before she gets back we must have our plans ready. Then you can stay and begin She is *not* bad—I'm *sure* of that since you've said it aloud—only very, very daring."

"Plans?" questioned I, in fear.

"Plans."

It sounded like a campaign!

"For the salvation of a—cook—is it?"

"*Nancy!*" said my aunt, with immense reproach for my wanton ignorance. And then I for the first time understood.

"Oh!" I said with relief. "What has she done? Eloped? And is it the violinist? or the mandolinist? or the palmist? or the poet? or the dramatist? Heavens! Perhaps it is the count!" I rapidly guessed—crescendo.

"Yes!" asseverated my aunt, wildly.

"But—not *all* of them? Which of them?"

"Don't be silly, Jock. There has been *no* elopement—as yet. But last night the *five* of them were here. Oh, such a night! Can't you see that I haven't slept?"

"Yes," said I.

She hurried to the mirror.

"In a multitude there is safety. And the musicians play very well," I comforted.

"Coon songs! Irish melodies! Bowery tunes! Cake-walks! Rag-time! Two-steps! Things! But if only they *would* play—and nothing else!"

I wanted to grin, but dared not.

"Oh, well——" I temporized. But she cut me off there.

"It is far from 'well,' Jock, and you know it. She was to faithfully pursue her study of Latin and Greek and Sanskrit. She promised."

"When she was seven!"

"She was ten! She *began* at thirteen."

"But, aunt dear, Greek—and Sanskrit—for Nan, at ten!—or thirteen!—or even at twenty-one!"

"Most proper for a girl who is to be the wife of a clergyman of the Established Church! *Most* proper!"

"Oh, *proper* enough," I admitted. Nan had only a speaking acquaintance with the word! "But——"

My aunt would have no buts. I should have remembered that, and did not. *I* was full of them. I wanted to hang the Established Church!

"Sometimes it seems the only proper thing she does——"

"And she don't do that any more!"

And I was mighty glad of it.

I was sufficiently rebuked by the movement of Aunt Izzy's nostrils.

"Promises! Regrets! She puts her name in the text-books as fast as I buy them. It ends there now. She *must* be able to help him to write his sermons. That's the duty of a clergyman's wife."

"She'd better deliver them for him."

"Jock, you're sacrilegious!"

"Well—her husband's flock—when he gets one—will be better pleased, I will warrant you."

She was quite impervious to my high humour.

"She'll *never* be a housekeeper!"

"Never!"

And I was sincere in that, and glad. I detest "housekeeping" per se—and more for Nan.

"Just fancy her the wife of poor, dear Cawdor!"

II

THE PINK TIP OF NAN'S FINGER

THIS referred to the fact, familiar to our family since Nan's birth, that she was to marry her English-American cousin, Cawdor, as soon as he received his orders.

That event was now impending. It had been alluringly held up to Nan as a very grand marriage, and she had assented to it with enthusiasm at the age of seven, when grand marriages are most likely to create enthusiasm in the breast of a maiden. There was much talk of mitres, and purple robes, and gold and gems, and incense, and chanting, and glittering progresses which she and Cawdor should lead, and palaces, and a state and power such, as I now think Wolsey did not quite have. This was my aunt's whole some way. She did things with her very soul. And, in this, she was aided and abetted, before his death, by my Uncle Eli, and, after it, by the constant contemplation and adoration of his virtues. For, besides being the greatest physician of his time, according to Aunt Izzy, he was the highest churchman. He had set the scheme to marry Nan to Cawdor going, and I remember often seeing Nan on his knee, entranced by the pageantry and splendour of which she was to be the reason and the centre. I remember, too, that at such times I would leave Nan there and go to the wood-shed and call Uncle Eli names which are not to be found in the Scriptures nor mentioned here. At that time I did not want Nan to be an archbishopress, as we called it in our private conferences on the subject—

but my wife. And, at that time, she did want to be an archbishopress—and not my wife.

Uncle Eli left the whole matter as a sacred charge —making it shiveringly solemn—in his will (which I heard read and have never forgotten)—and he divided between Aunt Izzy and Nan his great fortune for the purpose. There was a feeling in the family that it was a mighty obligation which all must help to discharge at the peril of some vague but horrid damnation to those who did not—me especially.

At present, however, Cawdor was destined to what was described as a very handsome living in London itself, whence he was expected by his American resources and spirit to reach the aforesaid archbishopric, and all the splendours which were so often pictured to us, with American celerity.

It was at this point that Nan's fortune was expected to be of the most distinguished use. I think we were given to understand that an archbishop either lived in Westminster Abbey or in some such largess and splendour. But—that the church did not provide a sufficient income It was intended that Nan should go to London and show them how an archbishop ought to live, move, and have his being. So Nan's fortune had been nursed during her minority until, as I have said, it was a large one itself—to which was to be added, in case of need—even if it made us all beggars—Aunt Izzy's portion.

It made Nan desperate and unhappy sometimes to think of this wealth. She yearned to give it away. But she confided nothing of this to any one but me, I fancy. It was my happy duty to aid Nan in such obscure matters as the proper place to put her name when she indorsed her cheques, and whether it should be written out or an initial used ; to tell her how much money she had, what her income was by the year and month and week and day—things about which she seemed preternaturally curious for a woman, yet never knew. It thus happened that she was often at the bank, and that, although we met rarely elsewhere, we met often enough there to keep up a state of intimacy

which was sufficient for second cousins. Whether or not Nan preferred anything more, I never knew. Whether or not I did, I shall not confide. But it was not an altogether unpleasant duty (she was not the only one for whom I did it) to add up her deposit slips and balance her bank-book while the pink tip of her finger followed my pencil and her hair brushed my face and I smelled dead violets!

Ah, me!

III

I DROP MY WATCH

"JOCK!" said my aunt.

"Yes, aunt dear," I smiled.

Then, I think, she went on talking. I went on dreaming.

Yes, Nan yearned more than any one I ever knew to give her uncle's money away. To waste it! To fling it about by handfuls. Sometimes she seemed to hate it, and I had to lecture her on the value of money—how hard it was to get, and, once got, to keep—its noble uses—the *solemn* use to which *this* was dedicated—and all that.

At these things she always stared with a despairing lack of comprehension. And she invariably countered by obliging me to decline some scheme, winningly and insidiously suggested, for accomplishing my opulence and her poverty, both of which she pretended vehemently to desire.

Another duty of mine which had become hereditary was the constant reminder to her that Cousin Cawdor's whole career—and perhaps the glory and stability of the Church—depended upon her. Though Nan usually took all this with the gravity in which it was meant—which I had been taught from childhood it required—she one day looked up at me curiously and said, out of that Latin learning she had piled up, mainly from the lexicon, against the day of her marriage to Cawdor:

"Morituri salutamus!"

I knew that much Latin myself. I laughed. Nan laughed.

And after that, somehow, I could have laughed oftener about it. But I did not. For always I was dogged by the sensation of tampering with something tremendous in its possibilities of evil for Nan. *I* was thought to be dangerous to her.

"Jock!" said my aunt, so suddenly that I dropped my watch—which I had secretly been consulting, because President Peuter had limited my time—upon the floor.

My aunt stared at it, as it lay blinking guiltily there, in a species of horror.

"Jock! You must have a better watch!"

I replied lightly, yet blushing, that my wages must first be increased.

I thought Aunt Izzy was about to crush the offensive timepiece with her foot, and rather hastily recovered it.

But she repented, if that were her intention, and made a memorandum.

I have forgotten, I think, to mention that I had the A to K ledger at the Apothecaries' National Bank.

And that it was a shocking watch. You will understand how shocking when I confess that I never allowed it to be seen by any one but myself.

"*Can* you fancy it, Jock dear?" asked my aunt.

After a moment I remembered that she was again speaking of Nan, and not a better watch.

"I can*not* fancy it," I said calamitously. In fact, I did not like to fancy it.

Perhaps you have observed this?

My aunt was silent for a moment. Then she sighed and went on.

"The night before it was that young man who brings the book with the horrid black palms in it. Sarah Bernhardt! Olga Nethersole! Peter Maher! James Jeffries! Who *are* they?"

"Er—— You must remember Jeffries?" I ventured.

"The unjust judge?"

I said nothing.

"There was no one else *that* night. Yet it was worse than when they are all here. They laughed

and whispered till after twelve. *So* impolite! I sat there and tried to read. But I fell asleep while he was telling her about the life-line. What *is* it? My book dropped, and they were so thoughtless as to laugh. I had the dreadful fancy that I had snored. I had to go to bed. I thought that was what they wanted, probably, after I got there. So I came back and listened at the portière. He was still telling her about the life-line. Then she took his hand and told him. All about the love-lump. I must have made a noise. That nasty young man came to the door and looked. He did not see me, though! Then they went on holding each other's hands and telling——"

Aunt was exhausted. I prompted her.

"About the life-line—the love-lump?"

"Yes!" she snorted, "whatever and wherever it is!"

"Disgraceful!" said I, with my hands folded and my eyes on the ceiling. "Shall I tell him to stay away from them?"

IV

DAMN THOSE WASP-WAISTED COUNTS!

A SILENCE which was meant for reproof followed. I fear that I did not so understand it then. I continued in my unholy levity:

"Or—I might cripple him?"

"And be sued for damages!"

"He wouldn't get any."

"I forgot that."

"My salary is not subject to attachment, levy, or sale."

"You talk like a lawyer!"

"I have had to consult a lawyer upon that point, my dear aunt!"

My aunt stared her horror.

"I don't believe it! You'd be borrowing money if that was the case."

Her confidence in my integrity was, to erring me, most comforting.

"Thank you, aunt," I said.

She took that for an admission that I had trifled with the truth, and dismissed the matter—once more for Nancy!

"Tell *her!* Don't talk! *I* know! It's her fault. A man must be encouraged in some way by a girl to——"

"To spend a whole evening on Nan's life-line?" said I. "Oh, no, my dear aunt!"

"And *his* love-hump? Excuse me! Did you say hump or lump?"

"I think hump is more likely to be correct."

"And there is a girdle of Venus!"

"I have heard of that!" I declared ominously.

"Where do you suppose it is?"

"I have not the least idea, aunt," I asseverated, looking at my own palm. "I certainly do not have anything in the least like a girdle."

"You would not be likely to. I suppose it is only the very modern young men who have it. Heaven knows where they all get it!"

"Heaven knows!" echoed I. "Venus had but one or two, I suppose."

We sighed our despair together.

"*I* haven't got it! Have I?"

My aunt held out her hand to me.

"No," I sighed once more; "I do not see it anywhere."

"No. I suppose at my age—it's—gone."

She looked disappointed. I wonder now whether she *wished* me to see it? I *would* have seen it had I to do it over.

"Before that it was the one who is writing a play—in metre! He wears a frock-coat morning, noon and night!"

"A very proper garment!" said I, gathering up the skirts of my own proudly.

"On a very improper young man!"

"Because he is writing a play?"

"Precisely!"

"Oh! It may be the only one he——"

"Then, for heaven's sake let him come in his waistcoat once in a while! I'd prefer that. I believe Nancy would. I hate that coat! I really think he must sleep in it!"

"I did not refer to the coat," said I. "I was going to say that it is probably the only play he will ever write. You can afford to pity him."

"Yes! After all, these are nothing."

"Nothing!" I agreed, happy to get them out of the way. It was so much done for Nan.

"And his play will be—nothing!" She got gruesome satisfaction from this.

"Very likely," I agreed.

"The idea of him trying to outdo Shakespeare! Can you fancy it?"

"I cannot, aunt."

"Why—he looks as if he had only one thought in his head! In his whole body!"

"Nan!" I cried, with a strange joy of my shrewd guess.

"Himself!"

"Oh!" said I, somewhat crestfallen.

There was a moment's silence. My aunt stalked up and down the room. Something was brewing. I waited. She became less and less savage. Then some at first difficult problem became clear to her.

She slowed down, stopped and faced me.

"*Jock*, what *do* you suppose they mean?"

"Aunt, I—I really— I am not good at—er—guessing."

I knew that I had better not guess!

"They mean—nothing!"

"Not a thing!" I was sure of that now.

"The others — the 'Poor Things.' But the count——" I became savage.

"He's in earnest!" I said belligerently.

"And he's really less account than any of them!"

For an instant I suspected a pun. But I looked at my aunt and knew better. Her face was quite embattled. I gripped my cue once more.

"Yes!" I cried. "Damn those wasp-waisted counts who take our girls to Europe——"

"And whip them!"

My aunt hissed it horridly. And she did not even rebuke my profanity.

"Yes," I agreed. "They wear corsets!"

"I have heard so, and I believe it!"

I would second anything my aunt said about counts —and Porphory especially. She seemed willing to reciprocate.

"And her money! Don't fail to keep those things before her mind's eye."

"If our girls would think of them more often—the

wasp-waists—the whippings—the corsets—the *money!*"

Again my crescendo! I thought Aunt Izzy would certainly be pleased. But she was not.

She put up her lorgnon and stared at me.

"Jock, you have said that twice. '*Our girls.*' And you are extraordinarily savage. I didn't know that you *had* a girl for him to take. If you have, you are of no use to me in this. I didn't think it of you." With immense reproach.

I wonder if I looked as much like a sheep as I felt?

"Aunt Izzy," I said, "I used the term colloquially. I have no girl. No girl has me. I am fancy free."

"Never mind. I knew it. You are too safe with girls—and they are too safe with you. That is the reason they don't care for you. And because they are too daring and up-to-date is the reason you don't care for them."

"Thank you, aunt," said I, with a gasp.

"Oh, if you had only come oftener!"

"Do you think I am good for her?"

"Good for her!"

Aunt Izzy's wonderful inflection completed the compliment.

"Aunt dear, I am pleased to hear it. I have never before had the least encouragement to think so."

"You're entirely too modest, Jock. Yes! Why she never stays up after ten o'clock when *you* are here!"

"I believe not."

"Only once it was ten-thirty!"

"Eh? When was that?" I begged gladly.

"The night you brought Fizzbang. *I* made you stay the other half-hour! The dear little dog!"

"Thank God, and Fizzbang—and you!" I laughed, "that that was my worst indiscretion."

"If you had come oftener, *they* wouldn't have stayed so late—so often."

"I noticed that I had a stopping and starting effect upon them. I think they call me the old man."

"Yes," said my aunt very proudly.

I am puzzled to this day to know by what curious course of indirection my aunt got her notion of me

As you may already have observed, it differed considerably from mine.

The clock struck. My aunt started up and began to hurry. I recognized these symptoms. I got to my feet.

"Yes," said my aunt, "you must go. I did not think of sending for you until the moment I telegraphed. It was so nice of you to hurry. I feel that I did the right thing in confiding the matter to you."

"Quite," I answered oracularly, wondering and fearing what the matter was.

Aunt Izzy suddenly remembered that she was not hurrying sufficiently.

"Now go, Jock dear"—she pushed at me—"but be sure to come to-morrow. We must consult further. The peril is imminent. Think of some plans in the meantime. Come at four. What *is* it I have at three to-day? No matter. It is something. I'll consult my diary. Four. Kiss me—and go."

She was gone before I was.

V

IF ALL COUSINS WERE LIKE ME THIS WOULD BE A BETTER WORLD

AS I stood on the steps, buttoning my gloves in a very leisurely fashion, I fancied that the door of the vestibule opened behind me. I looked. It was closed. Then, thinking that Aunt Izzy might not have gone as yet, and wanted to "consult" further, I turned and tried the knob. It yielded softly, but felt as if held in a hand. "The maid," thought I.

On my way down the street I was whistling softly the Intermezzo. At a distance some one began to whistle a pretty tenor to it. At first it pleased me. But the tenor took to trills and cadenzas while I was doing the theme, and I stopped to anathematize his impudence. Then, to show my mettle, I took it up again—strenuously. Again the tenor joined my soprano—nearer now. We went on in that fashion until a bystander could have traced the defiance in each part—spoiling the melody. Some passers smiled at me knowingly. It came nearer. The steps of my accompanist fell into accord with mine. Closer and closer. I was vengeful as an Indian. Somebody laughed. A small hand was shoved into mine. Nan!

I veered upon her savagely. But her sublime unconsciousness of my wrath and the comical distress of her locomotion disarmed me. She was desperately labouring, with her smaller person, to keep step with me.

"Jock"—she was quite breathless—"if you would make them just a little shorter—festina more lente, you know——"

I laughed and did so.

"Thanks," said Nan.

We paced along in silence for a half-dozen strides. Then Nan, having recovered her breath:

"Jock, what was it?"

"The Intermezzo."

"*Jock!*"

"What was what?"

Though I knew perfectly.

"Your confab with Aunt Izzy."

"Oh! Nothing much." I evaded with the lightness of determined deception.

"Nothing much!"

Nan seemed sufficiently savage to please me.

"Of no consequence in the least."

"It was about—*me!*"

"Yes."

I fancy this was only a shrewd guess of Nan's. She was quite unhorsed by my frank affirmative.

"And you called it nothing—much!"

"But, Nan——"

I pretended great regret.

"Of not the least consequence!"

"But, Nan——"

I had to laugh at Nan's dear, savage face.

"Yes! It is easy to laugh—at—at other people's —troubles!"

"Troubles! Oh, Nan!"

Nan softened.

"Jock, please be on my side."

I pretended to reflect.

"*Please!*"

She swung by my arm over the muddy gutter we were passing. She seemed to *know* that I would be on her side! And for her mere begging. Well——

"Jock, you're lovely!" she declared. "I knew you wouldn't fight against *me!* If all cousins were like you——" Nan sighed!

"This would be a better world," I finished for her, solemnly.

She laughed her approval and resumed her own step—two to my one.

"How did you know?" I asked.

"I listened."

"Listened? For shame, Nan!"

But she did not seem in the least ashamed. She laughed very joyously.

"Where?"

"At the portière."

I had to laugh myself.

"Nan! Eavesdropped!"

My chiding was too plainly a matter of duty and not morality. It had no effect upon my cousin.

"Yes," she confessed cheerfully.

"But, Nan, it's——"

"Oh, Jock, stop it! You're living in the dark ages. Everybody listens. Fiat lux!"

I threw out my chest.

"*I* never did in all my life!"

"Oh!—*women!*"

"Oh! As to that——"

"You don't know? No, you don't know *any*thing about women. If you'd come to see *me* oftener—you'd know more." Nan sighed again!

"Aunt thinks you a rather dangerous apostle," I laughed. "She thinks I am the only one who is safe from your—your——"

"Well, you *are*—safe. You stay away! Did she ask you to come to-morrow?"

I hesitated.

"I know she did!"

"She said I *must*."

"What time?"

"Oh! Didn't you hear that?"

"No. You were going then, and I had to get out of the way. And I didn't arrive at the curtain till you were half done."

She spoke of it with grief.

"Then I won't tell you," I said triumphantly.

"All right," said Nan cheerfully; "I'll have to stay in all day then. Pax vobiscum."

She left me and went back, whistling the Intermezzo.

I WAS more and more tempted to turn and look at her. Presently I did. She was a lovely little figure sailing away from me—very joyously. The afternoon sun was on her hair. I could see the splendours of it even at the distance I was. Our little butterfly! Nan! Who had never had a mother but for one short hour! Save dear little Nan! I laughed at Aunt Izzy's imaginings. Then I had a moment of anger. That any one *should*— Nan looked back. I am sure she knew exactly what I was thinking. She smiled hugely and flung me a kiss. Without considering what I was doing, I flung one back. Then, when I remembered, I darted around a corner. But still I saw her. She was walking backward, with a wondering look in her eyes. Is not that strange? That I could see her after I had turned the corner? And that she should walk backward—with that look?

Before I got home I tried to recollect what she might have heard. Then I said some things which I may not set down here.

VI

THROUGH THE HOLE IN THE GLASS

NEXT day Aunt Izzy came to the hole in front of my ledger. It was the first time she had done it. She seemed to feel that she had bearded us all in our den, though she was preternaturally brave—for a woman. She kept her veil down.

"Jock," she whispered rather breathlessly, "come closer to the hole. I'm not quite tall enough."

I stretched my upper half over my desk to do so.

"Nan has discovered that you are to come at four—"

"*I* didn't tell her!" I defended, before I was accused.

"You *must* have!"

"Aunt Izzy," I asseverated very solemnly, "I refused!"

"Oh, she asked you?"

"Yes."

"She did *not* ask me. I gave her no information whatever. Yet she knows. She must have listened!"

"No, she did not!"

"How do you know *that*?"

My aunt put on both her severity tones and her glasses.

"She told me that she did not."

I did not explain that she had also told me that she had listened. Nor that it was only because she had gone too soon that she missed that information.

"It's curious," observed Aunt Izzy. "I blamed you; and I came to say some plain words about it. But— She asked me to go to the dressmaker with her

at two. I said, very kindly, that I would; though it was an unusual request. Later she said that she could not go at that hour, as she remembered that she had arranged to meet Pellini. She asked me if I could go at three. I also said I could go at three. Then she recalled that she had promised to walk in the park with Count Porphory at three, and suggested four. Of course, I had to say that I had made an engagement for that hour."

I laughed quite odiously.

My aunt froze me with her starers. But then I fancied that I saw, even through her veil, a sudden enlightenment.

"Very well! If you think so!"

"Aunt, I did not say what I thought."

"Stop it! She will find—and so will you, if you doubt it—that I can be as cunning as she. You will come at *three*. We will have finished before she gets back with her horrid count!"

"Exactly!" I said, with enthusiasm.

"Do not be late," said my aunt, finally.

As she swept out, Mr. Peuter, who always walked the floor in front of our desks from eleven to twelve in the morning and from two to three in the afternoon, stepped hastily aside to let her pass. My aunt acknowledged his gallantry with a regal jerk of the head. Mr. Peuter, when she had passed, turned and looked thoughtfully after her. He stood that way a moment. Then he put on his glasses and stared at her as she descended the steps, flinging her train out of the way in a fashion I could account for only by her annoyance at my laughter.

"Say, look at Peuter!" whispered Barker.

As I looked up, Mr. Peuter's eye caught and held mine coldly for a moment. Then he resumed his walk up and down in front of our desks.

That was at eleven in the morning. At twenty-five minutes to three in the afternoon I got a telegram from Aunt Izzy.

"Come at two," it said. "Do not fail. Be on time! *Very* important! Come!"

VII

SHE NEVER SANG AFTER I HAD BEEN THERE

I MUST again have arrived in an unusual state of irruption. I meant to reprimand her savagely. But, first, I supposed that she would explain both the curious telegram and the change from three to two. She said nothing whatever concerning either thing. On the contrary, she began with great placidity:

"Excuse my hair-papers. Where did we leave off yesterday, Jock dear?"

"Where you thought I was good for her," said I, in the irony which was always fruitless.

"Yes," cried my aunt with immediate and joyous recollection; "when *you* go she retires at once and goes to sleep immediately."

"As if tired?" I gibed.

I was shocked by the fancy of a snicker behind the portière. I slyly reconnoitered. I could see no one. But I heard:

"S-sh! *On—my—side!* Memento me!"

My aunt was going on:

"Quite. After the others go she lies awake. Sometimes she laughs to herself—or sings. I have taken the liberty of listening."

The last with a righteousness which was a bit shocking.

"Jock! What *are* you doing away off there?"

I fear that I leaped away from the curtain in a panic.

"Ah!" said I, with guilty joy, "she thinks ridicule of *them*."

"She never laughs or sings after you have been here."

" No ! She thinks serious things of me ! "

Again came from the curtain the little laughter which I have likened to a snicker—but which was too delicious to be described by that word.

" Well, Jock, what are your plans ? "

" Plans " ? from me.

" Plans ! " from the curtain.

A reproachful stare from Aunt Izzy.

" But, my dear aunt——" I deprecated.

" I am going to put her entirely into your hands ! *I* can do nothing with her. She *says* yes, and *does* no."

" Well," I laughed hopelessly, " what am *I* to do ? "

" Simply save her. Do it in your own way. I must trust some one."

" But I have no way. I have never been trusted. I have never saved any one. You must help—me ! Or rather, I must help—you."

I fear it was a Macedonian cry. I observed the portière to shake as if the person behind it were laughing. I spoke to it.

" Aunt—she will be *hard* to save ! "

" Yes ! " agreed Aunt Izzy at once.

It shook again. But its tremors were threatening now. And I saw a small white fish flash in the opening.

" But, if you wish, I will *try* to do it ! "—lugubriously.

There was a faint applause at the door.

" Yes, Jock dear, for Cawdor ! "

Now it was a small laugh.

" Aunt Izzy, I will not only *try*—I will *do* it !—if she must be incarcerated ! "

" Jock dear, I knew you would—for Cawdor. You always liked him ! "

I have always detested him !

My aunt embraced me rapidly, and as rapidly released me—thank heaven !

" She endures you splendidly," said my aunt.

" Endures ! Yes."

There was an appropriate expression from the curtain.

" Now, if we are to conspire, aunt, let it be in plain words, so that no one——"

Something like a kiss against a hand.

"—*no* one"—I repeated it odiously—"*can* misunderstand."

"Well, first," counseled my aunt, "she must be prevented from becoming more—more——"

"Popular," said I.

"How delicately you put it, Jock dear! She ought to thank you for that. *I* meant to say—daring!"

Again the kiss against a hand.

"She must stop swearing."

"Yes."

"And quoting dreadful Latin inopportunely."

"Certainly."

"You must be here *always!*"

"I must earn my daily bread—and eat it. I ought to sleep six hours?"

I think my aunt could not have heard me.

"Then the others will keep away."

"Sort of scarecrow?"

"Yes. To keep the ravens away——"

"From the fascinating vegetable?"

"The money."

The little laugh was so distinct that my aunt went that way to look.

"Where are you giong?" I temporized, leading her away from the door.

"I thought I heard her. Did you hear anything?"

"The dog," I said.

"Jock, she would be horrid enough to listen. Doesn't that show how far she has gone the road to——"

"You said you listened yourself, aunt."

"I am her aunt!"

Aunt Izzy froze me with a queenly stare.

"On the road to——"

"Eavesdropping," I interrupted again.

Aunt Izzy gave up.

"Think of my three months in Europe, with no one in the house besides the servants—and you."

"And me only an afterthought!"

"Yes," she mourned.

"Take her with you."

"And have all the shady noblemen in Europe trail-

ing after us ? Spoiling Cawdor's last holiday before his ordination ? No ! I love her, but I will not sacrifice Cawdor to her—yet."

" You think I will make a more pleasing sarcifice."

Aunt Izzy looked at me reproachfully.

" *Your* immolation will be for only a few months. Think what it would be if it were for ever ! "

A very small voice said :

" In aeternis ! "

For my aunt I put up one hand in horror. For Nan I made a fist behind my back with the other.

" Don't speak of it ! " I begged.

" No ! But think of poor Cawdor ! For ever and ever and ever ! "

" Horrid ! " said I. " He'll divorce her ! "

" A churchman ! A clergyman of the Establishment ! "

My aunt clearly could outdo me in the simulation of horror.

" Well—a minister is brought up on the idea of sacrifice. He will expect nothing else."

Aunt Izzy's face hardened as if she were going into battle.

" Well, he shall *have* something else ! I am determined upon that. I suppose I would not have called you in yet. You know how one lets difficulties go on. But something *must* be done—or well under way—before I leave. I would feel criminally responsible if there were not. And I should have little pleasure in my holiday. But I feel that I can put the whole matter into your hands with the certainty of a happy result. You have never yet failed me."

Again I wondered briefly where my aunt got her interpretation of me.

" But," I sighed, " I'm afraid she'll marry me if she sees too much of me—and no one else ? I couldn't endure *that* ! "

" You ! Impossible ! "

" Oh, I don't know," said I. " Worse men have been married."

" Not to her ! "

" As yet—no. And Cawdor may turn out well."

" No girl will willingly marry a man as slow—and sure—and old-fashioned—and out of date—and good—and *poor*—as you. It's only the other kind they want to marry."

" The rapid—the uncertain—the fashionable—the up-to-date—the—ahem !—not good—the rich ? "

" Yes ! " laughed my aunt. " She would no more think of marrying you than that——" She looked about for some object sufficiently imbecile—" post ! "

The " post " she referred to was an emaciated Corinthian column which supported a bust of Dr. Hahnemann. My aunt's husband had been a violent high-dilutionist. The column was out of repair and very seedy. It had a red plush band at its top—now dusty and moth-eaten.

The curtain was agitated by renewed mirth. I took my revenge.

" The chances are that she *will* marry a post—and a worse one than that ! One with *no* fluting—*no* capital—no plush — smooth — villainous — cold — stony — *porphory !* "

" And with no marble bust on it ! " cried my aunt, sympathetically.

The curtain moved even more violently.

" With a blockhead on it ! " I added savagely.

" Of one thing you must be absolutely certain at all times, Jock——"

VIII

THE A TO K LEDGER—AND THE LEDGER FROM K TO Z

I DO not know, to this day, the one thing about which I was to be so certain. The door-bell rang—a shrill, peremptory alarum. My aunt stopped and put up her glasses, as if she could hear better in that way. She frequently did this. I also held my peace—to wonder whether Nan had escaped—and what I could do to help her if she had not. You must have observed my partizanship with Nan. But there was little time for either. The man was at the door in an absolute jiffy.

"Is Mr. Merival here?" asked the familiar voice of—Mr. Peuter! And it had all the bank savagery in it.

An exceedingly realistic dramatization of my dismissal from the service of the bank took place in one department of my mind, while another was wondering what the horrid reason might be.

"Yessir! Step right in, sir," the man was saying.

"Sure he's here?"

Peuter's voice sharply reduced its calibre.

"Oh, yessir! One moment, sir!"

This was the man.

"Excuse me, miss."

This was President Peuter.

What the deuce did it all mean? Was Nan, somehow, in it?

Mr. Peuter came in. My aunt, with her hands in horror to her hair, fled by the rear door.

"Mr. Merival— Aha!"

Peuter halted and seemed sorry. I determined to meet my calamity half way. We Merivals are not cowards.

" I can readily understand," said I, with what could have seemed to an onlooker rather pathetic dignity, " that you must feel some embarrassment—er—at the —er—the object of your visit——"

To my surprise, President Peuter looked craven.

We glared at each other a moment. Perhaps I had not guessed correctly. It must be something worse. I might be suspected of some of—the things Barker was once in a while suspected of.

" Mr. Peuter, sir——"

I was a little wild. President Peuter's distress increased.

" The object of my—er—visit—er—the fact is—er—Mr. Merival, I—I was not sure—of—of finding you here."

He seemed to regret my finding !

I remained silent—determined now not to assist in my own conviction.

" I went to your lodgings—and was told that you *might* be here."

Another silence. Mr. Peuter looked as if he wanted to run. I grew braver.

" So I came on here—and—Mr. Merival, sir. I think you—you—keep the ledger from A to K ? Aha ! "

As if he had suddenly found a gem !

I calmly nodded and awaited his disclosures.

Mr. Peuter sniffed a little and turned towards the curtain. He must have smelled patchouli. I did. He looked about craftily, as if in search of something.

" I think, Mr. Merival, sir, that I must ask you hereafter to—er—aha !—take—the—ledger from K to Z ! Aha ! "

As if he had again chanced upon something valuable.

I stared rather crazily.

" And let Barker have the one from A to K. Aha ! "

Once more Mr. Peuter looked with guilty expectancy about the room—again he sniffed the patchouli. Then he said very suddenly :

" Good afternoon, Mr. Merival, sir. Aha ! "

As he hurried through the curtains he heard a swish of petticoats. And I was early enough to see the tail of Aunt Izzy's gown disappear through the door to the dining-room. Mr. Peuter could not have helped seeing it. I was both sorry and ashamed—for Aunt Izzy. But Mr. Peuter was not. He seemed much more sure of himself—and decidedly more cheerful. It was as if he had just found what he had come for.

" Good afternoon, Mr. Merival, sir," he repeated with almost hilarious gaiety. He also shook hands. This had never happened before.

I followed him out of the front door, to the steps—feeling like a reprieved but not quite pardoned criminal.

Nan was approaching—in a little trepidation, I fancied—and I was still more mystified. How did she get out when *I* supposed her listening at the portère ? She ascended the steps. Mr. Peuter violently raped his hat from his head and said :

" Back already, miss ? "

Nan nodded him a beatific yes.

Mr. Peuter, with another hearty good afternoon, was gone.

" Nan," begged I, " for heaven's sake explain. Am I dreaming ? Or *was* that President Peuter—in *your* house—and *is* this you—*out* of it ? What did he want, and how did *you*——"

" Close the vestibule door," cautioned Nan, in a hasty stage whisper.

I did so.

" He's sneaking upon Aunt Izzy ! " declared Nan, in another huge whisper.

" Who ? "

" That man."

" Don't you know him ? "

" I've seen him—at your bank. I suppose he sweeps."

" He's our president ! "

Nan was no more impressed than if his business *had* been to sweep.

" He spoke to you ? "

" Yes. I spoke to him first."

" When ? "

"When I came out and he came in. I said, '*S-sh!*' I shook my finger at him—this way."

"Nan!"

"Well, did you want me to be caught? He came so suddenly that I couldn't get away. He was at one end of the hall, and the man at the other. I was between. I knew Aunt Izzy would fly upstairs. Her hair wasn't up. I was surrounded. The only thing I could do was to pretend that I was just going out. Fortunately there was a hat and gloves on the hall-stand. Fortune favours the eavesdropper! Get in now. Aunt Izzy will be wondering where you are. Leave the door ajar. I'll sneak in presently. Take her out of the hall at once. Allons! Marchons!"

While I was making my disposition to enter like a malefactor, Nan was whispering:

"Aunt Izzy told me she saw him at the bank yesterday. She said he had 'noticed' her. I think she must have 'noticed' him. I knew him at once. She spoke with so much enthusiasm about the pretty pink spots in his cheeks. Ecce homo!" She laughed.

I returned to the parlour stealthily. My aunt was ensconced between the lace and the damask of the curtain to the window nearest the door, trying to look both ways—in the direction Mr. Peuter had gone, and at the spot where I had stood but a moment before!

I coughed and ostentatiously looked for my aunt in other directions.

When I turned, she appeared to have just stepped in from the hall.

"*Oh!*" said I, with a little start which, though I say it myself, was very well acted.

"*Oh!*" echoed my aunt, with even better effect. "Where *did* you vanish to! I have been looking and looking for you!"

I dramatized my surprise.

"Why! I have been looking for *you!*"

"How funny!" said my aunt.

"Funny," said I, with a gay, deceiving laugh, leading her out of Nan's way.

"Er—that man, Jock dear?"

"He is gone. Don't bother. You'll never see him again. It was our president—Mr. Peuter. He came to put me on the K to Z ledger."

"Is that something important?"

"Very! It couldn't wait!"

"You don't say so, Jock dear!" cooed my aunt, regarding herself in the mirror with satisfaction.

IX

DID YOU EVER POUR COALS OF FIRE INTO A LOVELY EAR?

"NOW I must go," said my aunt, remembering to be in a hurry. "I had only a moment to give you. That is why I hurried you. There is a meeting of the Bas-Bleue Société, and I am to read some pathetic verses by our new bard—to the old one—entitled 'Gone But Not Forgotten.' Or is it 'Forgotten But Not Gone'? And I am untuned—unstrung—un——"

My aunt behaved as if she were.

"Oh, well—I must go. But you must promise that you will let her see absolutely no one but *you* while I am in Europe. I shall ask a strict account of your stewardship the moment I return. *You* shall be responsible for her. You are to be my heir, remember—unless Cawdor does not get on well. In that case you know——"

I knew.

"But, aunt, in Heaven's name, what am I to *do* with her?"

"Take her to the libraries—to the theatre when Shakespeare is played—or *Rip Van Winkle*. To church whenever you can—to the Zoological Gardens—to all the lectures on culture—and so forth—to the hospitals on visiting days—I will give you my list——"

"But, my dear aunt, only an engaged man could so entirely take possession of a girl who is of age—now, I think—and has a mind and money of her own——"

My aunt flew at me with a huge cry. Once more she embraced me—*kept* me embraced.

"Jock—Jock, my *dear* boy! you have done it—

solved it—you have saved her! I knew you would! I told you so!"

Even Nan was shocked into incaution. I saw her bright hair thrust through the space between the tapestries. She was strenuously listening with one ear.

I steered my aunt away from the portière. It was a wonder she had not seen that lovely burst of hair. I saw nothing else.

"My dear aunt—it was quite involuntary then," said I.

"Yes," said my aunt. "But it is none the less beautiful!"

A hand came forth from the curtains. It opened and shut invitingly—then closed threateningly into a small fist. Then it went up to the exposed ear and made a funnel there.

"Aunt," said I, solemnly, "you have heard of heaping coals of fire upon one's head?"

"Yes," answered my aunt. "It's in the Bible, Jock!"

"But have you ever heard of pouring them into one's ear?"

My aunt flew out of my arms and regarded me distractedly.

For this unexpected result I was thankful.

"Why—Jock!" she said.

"You *have* heard of *heaping* coals? Well, I shall *pour* coals into that lovely ear! Observe!"

"Jock!" fluttered my aunt again.

"I'm glad, my dear aunt," said I, "that you understand that it cannot be done easily. *I* anticipate the most tremendous difficulties. My cousin Nan is not the sort of girl to take kindly to being saved. She's been running wild too long."

"Stop it!" threatened my aunt, with a savage stamp of her foot. "I'm no fool—neither are you. Your idea about being engaged—and so on—showed that."

I was quite satisfied. The hair had been slowly withdrawn. I did not want to be hard on Nan, after all. I wondered whether I might have had my coals too hot. My aunt talked on.

"You *must* propose to her. She *must* accept you,

Then the others *must* stay away. If they don't—You understand ?"

My aunt made a savage movement with her foot.

"I understand," said I, hastily, looking toward the curtain to know whether the eyes there had seen it. I think they had. The curtain laughed.

"And, all the time, you can be moulding her for Cawdor !"

Now the curtain spoke :

"Moulding ! Me ! Hurrah—hurrah—hurrah ! Oh, it will be *lovely*—Jock *dear !*"

'And when he comes ?" I gasped, with what breath I had left.

"Why, you——"

She paused, indignant at my want of perspicacity.

"Go ?"

"He can be depended upon to manage her when she is once under his——"

"Thumb ?"

"Influence ! Such language. Jock !"

The curtain laughed.

"More coals !" I thought.

"Why must the poor girl be married at all ?" I inquired. "No one is less fitted for the marriage state. I have never heard you say anything, my dear aunt, especially favourable to it."

"What, sir, have you ever heard me say that was unfavourable to it ?"

She put her starers on me, and I wilted at the knees.

"Answer me !" demanded my savage aunt.

"I have heard you say that Uncle Eli——"

"Was a very great man—*very*—as physician and churchman."

"Yes, but——"

Aunt cut off my fatuity incontinently.

"He was *too* great—*too* busy—*too* much concerned with matters of vast moment to interest himself in domestic affairs as he otherwise would have been delighted to do. He was cold and abstracted—yes. But genius is ever so. He should never have married. He should have given all his great energies to the ignorant

world! Yes. *No* woman was good enough to marry him! I have always felt that. I have always tried to live as if he were still here. I always shall! *That* is what I call devotion—to live, after the revered one has passed away, as if he were still here—here—here—always! Looking on! Seeing—seeing everything! Approving or disapproving of it! He did that! Yes! With a movement of the eyes! Or a word! There are no more men like the great doctor! No! When you look at his picture you can see that!"

My aunt had no breath left.

X

I PRAYED NOT TO BE LIKE HIM

I LOOKED up at the doctor's stern portrait. The hair was in a mathematical top-knot. It bulged smoothly over each ear. I was, in the moment of my glance, thankful that there were no more like him. And I was sorry that Aunt Izzy fancied him always with her. He looked an extremely disagreeable man to live with—dead or alive. Indeed, I could testify to half of this. I think I never saw him smile. I think he never saw me smile. I was afraid. In fact, I have a fancy that he never really *saw* me, and had only a vague perception of me. I was of no consequence. Nan was the person who mattered to him. Looking at his face now, it seemed as if a smile would have fractured something. I liked him less dead than alive. He had given Nan to Cawdor. It had not seemed utterly irrevocable while he lived. He might change his mind. But he couldn't now.

Perhaps my aunt remembered a little of this, also. She watched me. I saw her smile.

"You used to ask whether the great doctor had ever been a boy," she laughed.

"Yes," said I. "I remember that very well."

"And do you remember what you asked when I told you that he had been?"

"Yes,"

"What was it?"

Aunt Izzy still laughed.

"Whether I would ever be like him."

"And I said I hoped so?"

"Yes."

"You didn't say a word to that—but it did not seem to make you—hap—happy." She was laughing.

"No."

"The doctor was not a man to make any one—merely happy."

"I know that," said I.

"Once, when you didn't seem to like it, that he wanted Nancy for Cawdor and the Church, he demanded your reason for it—quite as if you were a grown person. Do you remember?"

"Perfectly," said I.

"What did you answer?" laughed Aunt Izzy.

"That *I* wanted her."

She laughed again.

"Do you still want her?"

"No!" said I, hotly.

But then, hang it! I looked fearsomely at the curtain.

Aunt Izzy laughed with almost abandon. I wonder whether she suspected to what she had betrayed me in that forward phrase?

"Of course not. Er—I think the doctor told you that you were little fool, and——"

"Made me saw wood," said I.

My aunt laughed as if she were sixteen.

"Then you—stopped wanting her?"

"I stopped sawing wood. Nan came out and cried."

"Goodness! Perhaps, then—you still want her? Dear Jock, don't. She's too daring for you. She'd teach you to swear! She'd worry you with her Poor Things—her Little Italy trips. She'd puzzle you with her Latin— Jock, my dear nephew, *do* you still want her?"

Do you observe that, in spite of Uncle Eli, my aunt was a mighty good sort?

"No," I said, with, perhaps, unnecessary emphasis. "I do not!"

My aunt still laughed. I watched the curtain. It continued expressionless.

"They told me you prayed that night that you might *not* be like him?"

"I did," said I.

"Your prayer has been answered," smiled my aunt, grimly.

"Thank you," said I.

"You're welcome," said my aunt.

I felt hurt that the curtain did not move. I poured some more coals!

"Aunt Izzy," I said, "you must permit me—to decline—the honour of saving my cousin."

The curtain did not move.

"No, I won't!" said my aunt.

"Some one else—*any* one else—would answer your purpose better," I insisted.

"No—no—no! Don't decline the honour! It'll be lovely, even if you don't want me, Jock *dear—dear* Jock!" From the curtain! I was satisfied.

"I know that you and Nancy never cared for each other's society. But that is precisely why I want you and no one else. You are safe. A girl is never so safe as with some one she has known all her life—especially some one to whom she is entirely indifferent—especially a cousin—who is considerably older than she—and"—this was her Parthian arrow—"whom she sends on errands!"

"I fear fate has marked me for her saviour," I replied, with a hypocritical sigh and an immense joy.

"I must go," threatened my aunt. "Is there anything else?"

As if all the rest had been mine!

"Aunt dear, have you considered the danger?"

This was suggested to the curtain.

"Danger? Why, of course not! To whom?"

"To her."

She laughed.

"To me."

She smiled.

"To him."

"Nonsense!"

"To you."

" Jock, you're a fool ! "

I walked happily away. My course was laid toward the portière.

" A moment ago you said I wasn't," I answered to my aunt. To the curtain : " You understand the risk ? "

" Yes ! It's such a lovely risk !—dear Cousin Jock ! Nil desperandum ! "

" Remember Cawdor," said my aunt.

" Remember Nan ! " said the little voice behind the curtain.

" Oh, aunt," I said cheerfully, " I'll do it."

" Heaven bless you, Mister Merival ! " whispered the curtain.

" I knew you'd do it," said my aunt, heartily. " Why, if she was to marry that fellow with the violin—or the one with the mandoline—or the one with the palms—or the poet—or the dramatist—or the count with the horses and the bad debts—you would never forgive yourself."

" No," I answered fervently.

" And *I* would not."

" No."

" And *she* would not."

" And if she should marry me ? "

" Then we would all forgive you much less." At first Aunt Izzy spoke severely. Then she relaxed and smiled. " I want you to stay here till she comes in and begin at once. Remember Cawdor ! That shall be our watchword. I must be going. Good-bye. Kiss me."

XI

SHE DID ALL THE REST—I KISSED HER!

"ME too!"

It was a huge, laughing whisper from Nan's head where it thrust itself through the curtains. Her lips were temptingly puckered as if she meant nothing else.

My aunt went out by the door on the right. Nan danced in upon me by the left. She knelt before me and put up her hands in beseeching.

"Save me, mister!" she whispered, laughing tragically.

"It was disgusting of you to listen," I reproved.

"I don't like that word, for a man. It's a woman's word. Say—say—disgraceful!"

She rose and regarded me haughtily.

"Say disgraceful!"

She stamped a glittering little foot.

"Disgraceful," said I.

She smiled and relapsed from her attitude of hauteur.

"It wasn't, Jock—not at all. I was protecting myself against —my——"

"Your?"

"Enemies."

I laughed. She was delicious. Nan laughed too.

"Did you know I was there, Jock?"

"Yes."

"And you said those nasty things for me?"

"Yes. You needed to be punished."

" How sweet of you ! Jock, I was around the corner already. But I saw you coming running—wiping the perspiration—buttoning your gloves—and coat—this way." She illustrated me piquantly. " Then I knew there must be something dreadful up. You don't often hurry. And aunt has been so queer ! So I just came back. I'm *so* afraid of—*fire !* "

" And eavesdropped ! "

" Wasn't it lovely ! Let's do it again—sometimes. Punish me more, Jock ! Heat up your old coals ! "

" Certainly ! I've enjoyed it immensely. I am enjoying it now ! To deceive my aunt—to save you—and be lost myself ! "

I laughed. Nan looked as if she did not understand.

" That's not a nice laugh ! " she said solemnly.

" Oh ! Isn't it ? "

She had not the slightest appreciation of my subtleties.

" No," she agreed simply. " You are enjoying saving me, you dear old thing ! And you shall enjoy it—more ! So will I. And you shan't be lost—not one bit. If you are, I'll find you and keep you."

She had been seating herself very carefully with reference to me. As she completed the disposition of her person, she sat with her back half turned from me, where she could just see me by making a lovely curve in her neck.

" Now, Jock," she said.

" What ? "

" Do your duty ! "

" My duty ? "

" Oh, bother ! Propose to me ! I'll accept you ! "

" I'll do nothing of the kind," I said. " It's too solemn——"

" There's nothing solemn about it," laughed Nan. " It's—it's funny ! "

" Oh ! Then you've had experience ? "

" You're not very flattering, Jock. I'm twenty-one."

She seemed really indignant.

" I'm a good deal more ! " I said.

"Jock! You don't mean to say that you—*never*—never—never?"

"Never!"

"Isn't that sweet! To be able to teach *you!*"

She was looking up at me with a pretty abstraction. When she spoke again, it was dreamily.

"*You!*"

Then she woke up.

"Well, then, I sit here—indifferent, like this, but alive and waiting. I've always done it that way."

She tapped the carpet with her foot.

"I think I'd better be saying something about the—crops—oh, they're gathered!—the horse-show, then—while you're getting on your knees. Go on! Don't poke so!"

"Do you think I'm going to get on my knees?—to *you?*"

"Certainly. I'll reject you if you don't. Remember Cawdor!"

She laughed and I joined her.

"There's nothing to do but propose and be accepted. I think I'm very nice to accept you so promptly—after—the *coals*."

I was amazed to see the curtain behaving strangely again. I smelled—patchouli! To Nan I said savagely:

"The others are to go?"

"Absolutely. The Poor Things!"

"There is to be no one but me?"

"Absolutely. I'll write them little notes on my enamel-paper announcing our——"

"S-sh!"

The curtain bulged inward. I drew Nan a little further from it.

"Er—have—*you* any——"

"—anything to say why sentence of marriage should not be pronounced against me? Not a word!"

"Nan, you know perfectly what I mean. I don't want any misunderstanding about—about—things—hereafter. I don't want you to say that I took advantage of you."

"Don't worry about—*that*," laughed Nan.

"Well, then, that you took advantage of me."

"Nor about *that*. You are my cousin. I guess I know what cousins are for!"

"You certainly know—that it is all—for Cawdor—not for me. And you can see that it is well to have our understanding in advance of the——"

"Catastrophe? Execution?" laughed Nan. She reflected a moment, with her head bowed bewitchingly. Then she smiled sweetly up at me, with the effect of having something momentous to say. "You must come when I want you?"

"Certainly."

"And you must go——"

"When you don't want me?"

She nodded roguishly.

"You are to adore me whenever I want to be adored—just as if you were not my cousin, and were my real fiancé——"

"In that I shall have much pleasure," I answered grandiloquently.

There was something like a snort from the curtain. I turned in time to see it wildly agitated. There was quite a waft of patchouli. I saw Nan put up her delicious nose and sniff. Then she smiled.

"And you are never to listen at the curtain."

I put my hand upon Nan's mouth. She held it there with both her own—her laughter bursting through.

I looked at the curtain. It was ominously quiet.

"That was dreadful!" I chided in whispers, laughing a little myself.

"Not at all," whispered Nan, with entire confidence. "She knows that I listen, and I know that she listens! There! You see, you *didn't* understand! All women listen!" She added this, not in extenuation, but triumph. "But *I* wouldn't listen at—at—*such* a time!"

"You should have pretended that it was—something else."

"Does she do that when I——"

"Yes," I prevaricated, in the interest of morality.

"All right," agreed Nan instantly. "I'll fancy it's —the dog!"

"Yes," said I; "that's fine and generous!"

"Yes! You invented—the dog!"

There was a little tremor of the tapestry.

Nan leapt toward it.

"Fizzbang!" she cried. "Come here! Come here instantly!"

Something—not a dog—retreated.

She stood and listened a moment, then returned to me.

"Did you see anything scamper?" she asked.

I said no.

"Cave canem!" said Nan.

XII

HOW WOULD NAN FEEL WITH A LIMITED VOCABULARY OF SWEETHEART WORDS!

NAN laughed hugely and pinched me. She resumed—quite as if there had been no interruption:

"And when I don't want to be adored——"

"I am to go?"

"No. Stay—and be sensible. You are to take me wherever I want to go to——"

I held up a finger. Nan sniffed. The curtain bulged.

"The Zoo—the hospitals—*Rip Van Winkle*—afternoon lectures—all the things in the back of the Directory."

I gave her a delighted affirmative. The curtain relaxed.

"I am to call you all the sweetheart names I like."

"Ah—er—I hardly think that—er—prudent," I said to the curtain.

Its motion told me I was approved.

Nan laughed and rebelled.

"I *will* call you all the sweetheart names I like! How can I ever be prepared for Cawdor if I don't?"

"Ah," said I, "quite true. I had forgotten that."

But I threatened her privately.

"Remember Cawdor!" said Nan. "And you're to call me sweetheart names only when——"

"You wish it?" I suggested, for the curtain.

"When it is *necessary*," admonished Nan. "I might exhaust my vocabulary—of sweetheart words. Then you would be useful. In the meantime, you might think of some. Invent them. I prefer the very latest. And I know my dear Cousin Cawdor will do the same. Why, how *would* I feel going over there with a limited vocabulary of sweetheart words? Remember that you are training me for Cawdor—not yourself."

Nan laughed surreptitiously and pinched my arm.

"No," I said solemnly.

"Poor old Jock!" whispered Nan, with another and more violent pinch.

"Have I made a mistake in tactics?" I whispered.

"I haven't," Nan whispered back. "Oh, I'll be such a burden on your back that you'll wish—I'll teach you to conspire against me!" Aloud she said: "Yes! Like old Binsad the Sailor man."

"Sinbad," I suggested.

"Stop it! I hate men who are for ever showing off their er—u—di—tion."

She got it out in four gasps.

I laughed. So did Nan. I fancied that the portière laughed.

"That shows mine," said Nan. "Don't forget—your—*duty!* S-sh! I sit here, and you kneel—there. You've *got* to do it now—the dog is there!"

She fixed me in place. I faced the curtain.

"Ready?"

"Ready."

"Now you say— You had better have my hand. S-sh! She can't hear us—only see. And it *looks* all right. No—only one of them. I need the other for my handkerchief—no—my— What *did* I have in the other hand when the count— S-sh! Was it a fan or a scent-bottle? Oh! it was a hat-pin! Never mind, my handkerchief will do for *you!* Oh, she thinks I'm simply hesitating. Well, let us get on. Now you say: 'Darling, I have loved you ever since——' How long *is* it?"

She turned to look at the clock—and improved the opportunity to observe the curtain. Then she giggled.

" Nearly seven minutes ! ' Darling, I have loved you for nearly seven minutes ! Will you be my wife ? ' "

I said this.

" Now I say—faltering a little—don't you know—' It's sudden—but—ye-es.' Presto ! Done Candida Pax ! Have you a ring for me ? "

I took my mother's wedding ring off my little finger and slipped it on her third one. I kissed the pretty hand.

Nan was shocked to a moment's silence.

" Oh, you will learn ! " she laughed. " You are doing splendidly." Then she commanded : " Now kiss *me !* "

There was a distinct agitation of the portière, and more of the same thing in my own cardiac region. And, by Cupid ! I thought there was in Nan's !

I kissed her !

" Remember Cawdor ! " said Nan, hollowly. Then she whispered—for me : " Oh, you'll regret it ! It shall be Dear, Dearer, Dearest and Sweet, Sweet, Sweet-heart —till you are that tired you'll pray for death ! "

" I shall never tire of it," I said with emotion.

And then a strange mood came upon Nan. She looked up at me. I looked down at her. Something clairvoyant passed between us. For an instant the roguery was gone from her face. I do not quite know what she saw in mine. She whispered :

" Jock ! You kissed me ! Kissed me ! You haven't kissed me for ten years ! Ten years ! That is one of the penalties of growing up—not to be kissed—" She halted a little, then smiled—a trifle sadly—" by one's cousin. Ten years ! Three thousand days ! A hundred thousand hours ! Fifty hundred thousand minutes —I haven't enough arithmetic for the seconds ! "

I laughed a little uncertainly.

" You kissed me ! " Nan repeated in happy whispers.

A little silence fell. Nan looked down. She was twisting the ring about her finger.

" You kissed me ! " she whispered, so that I could scarcely hear it—only for her own dear soul, I think.

Then, suddenly :

"Jock! Where did you get this ring? It is old, old, old! And the most beautiful engagement ring I have ever seen!"

Was she pretending? It was a simple band of gold.

"Jock"—now almost breathlessly—"whose was it?"

"My mother's wedding ring," said I.

A little look which was almost terror came for a moment in Nan's eyes.

XIII

THE TRAGEDY OF AUNT IZZY'S RAT

NAN then rose and hung in my arm lackadaisically, facing "any dog who might happen to be at the door!"

"Now you've got to keep all your promises, and I will keep mine—I think."

"Agreed!" I laughed, singularly happy to have her hanging that way on my arm—even though I knew it all for precisely what it was.

"Oh, Jock," she whispered happily, "won't we have fun!—being engaged. And won't you be sorry that you conspired! Jock, you were mean to me! You should have—de—defended me."

I saw the curtain bulge at these pretty whispers.

"Jock, I don't *hate* you for it," she went on, tugging my arm against her. "You *had* to do it. But I must punish you, anyhow. You punished me, you know."

"I poured coals of fire into your—ear," I laughed.

"You never touched me!" laughed Nan.

The curtain was again aggressive.

"Remember Cawdor!" I cried.

"Yes!" cried Nan, in an orotund voice, "when we falter in our noble purpose—or forget— Remember—"

"For heaven's sake, Nan," I whispered, "that is too much!"

"I always overdo things," Nan said contritely. But then she added, with a superb assumption of seriousness: "Jock, I really want to do what you wish. But sometimes I will forget. Then you must——"

She put her arm a little more firmly into mine and pulled me to the window—at the furthest point from the curtain which the room afforded. I tried to obstruct her.

"I will say a word to you," she whispered. "It is disgraceful to eavesdrop. *I* wouldn't do it if you—and some other girl—just engaged—were— Jock, I *didn't* come back to listen. I trust you."

I said nothing, and twisted my neck to keep my eyes on the door.

"Jock, don't you want to know *why* I came back?"

"No," I said brutally—and instantly regretted it.

"Then I'll tell you without any wanting. I'd rather do it that way, anyhow. It's more independent."

But she didn't—only stood there, holding my arm and looking pensively out into the square, twisting the ring.

"Jock, you didn't mean that, did you?"

"What?"

"That I was wicked—horrid—*hard* to save?"

"Yes," I said. "And Aunt Izzy hears every word we——"

"Jock—you hurt me."

She dropped my arm and went to the other window. I observed with joy that the teakwood cabinet hid her from Aunt Izzy. I followed her.

"Nan," I whispered, "I didn't mean to hurt you. I *had* to say that."

She smiled up at me like an angel.

"Jock, I came back to see *you!*"

I tried to get in behind the cabinet, but she laughed and kept me out.

"You must go!" she said aloud, pushing me along toward the door.

I took up my hat sullenly—I meant to stay a little longer. I had forgotten all about Aunt Izzy.

"Don't you remember—that you were to go—under certain circumstances?" laughed Nan.

"When you didn't want to be adored," I begged.

"And what, sir, gave you the impression that I wanted to be adored—now—to-day—here?"

It was the most beautiful assumption of indignation possible.

I looked down at her. The pretty face did not relax a particle.

Hang it!—*was* it an assumption?

My hat dropped from my hand to the floor.

Nan handed it to me solemnly.

I stood for a moment and brushed it with my sleeve. Nan laughed, and suddenly pushed me through the curtains.

I collided violently with Aunt Izzy.

"I made a mistake," she explained panically. "It was to-morrow—not to-day—for the Bas-Bleue thing. I've just got back! And Nancy——"

She removed her bonnet with such haste and violence that she brought off with it some huge artificial thing of hair, called a rat. With a cry of horror, she plunged up the stairs, hiding her head with her hands.

"Jock!—it wasn't the dog!"

It was a beautiful whisper from Nan—now between the curtains.

I do not regret the adoring look I flung her. She was exquisite that way—and since she did it often, I think the little imp must have known this. Her sunny head between the green curtains! I see you now, dear, dear Nan!

She looked up the stairs and smiled.

"Jock, don't forget to save me."

"I will not," I threatened.

"Could you save me at tea—on Thursday?"

"I may as well begin then as another time," I said. "I cannot begin too early."

"Five, Jock. And unless you come early— The count, you know, and the palmist— A quarter to five? Don't forget to remember—Cawdor!"

"I will be here at a quarter to five."

She flung me a kiss and vanished. I smelled patchouli. Aunt Izzy descended from above in complete repair.

"I am glad you waited," she said.

But her voice and attitude were excessively—suspiciously—caustic—ironical.

She went to the door with me. In the vestibule she put up her lorgnon and looked me over severely.

"It is very impolite to whisper," said she.

"But, my dear aunt——"

"And the *kiss* was quite unnecessary—*quite!*"

"Did you see that?" I questioned, in guilty affright, yet in guilty joy.

"No. My sight is defective—but not my hearing!"

"But, aunt dear, you wanted me to become engaged to her!"

"Quite unnecessary—to kiss her. Your mother's ring was bad enough."

"I beg your pardon, aunt; the kiss is an important part of it!"

I said this with indignant force. Yet, I fear, after it was said I looked foolishly—perhaps even joyously—guilty. She once more inspected me with her starers.

"Jock," she said, "I hope I will not be disappointed in you."

"I hope so," I laughed, with bravado.

I was now safely on the outer step.

"Jock, I hope you will not fail to remember Cawdor."

Then she sadly closed the door.

I regret to confess that I did not feel the shame which my aunt's little castigation ought to have made me feel—and which she, I have no doubt, meant me to feel—but, on the contrary, an immense lightness and joy. Something within me laughed and sang. And alas! I fear that it communicated with my outwards before I reached home, for people turned to stare at me. And even then I saw, all the time, Nan's dear, tempting face between the curtains! She had never been so bewitching! And I had never been so—bewitched!

Good God! Just then, like a Memento Mori, thundered my aunt's last words at my brain doors!

"Remember Cawdor!"

Still I saw Nan! But she was far—far away!

And the joy had gone from her face as it had from my heart.

Remember Cawdor!

And yet—God help me!—for I couldn't—I had kissed her! And she was wearing my mother's wedding ring! And, such as they were—these made her mine—for the little while—until Cawdor—Ah!——

Remember Cawdor!

XIV

THE FIRST SMILE OF MR. PEUTER

'JOCK," said my aunt, through the hole in the glass before me, "Nancy tells me that you are to take tea with her to-morrow?"

I nodded. Barker was listening with all his ears, and I preferred not to have him know anything about my affairs—and Nan. Nan was not for such as Barker—or me. Clerks!

"I hope you will seize the occasion to give her a great deal of good, sound advice."

"I certainly will," said I, sternly.

"I have taken the liberty of telling her that you would."

"Quite right."

I wished she would go. Barker was too busy to be at all busy.

"I think it due to you to say that I already notice a considerable change for the better."

"The deuce!" said I, quite off guard at once. "Already!"

"She sings a great deal."

"Oh!"—with the air of saying, "Is that all?"

"She has been very nice to me."

"Oh, she's always—*nice*," I laughed.

"I had not observed it," commented my aunt, dryly.

"Well, I mean—er——"

"To you."

"Yes."

I laughed. Aunt Izzy smiled.

"She has bought a new frock——"

"Oh, she's always doing that!"

"—for the occasion."

"Thursday?"

"Yes. She is killing the dressmaker to have it done."

I am afraid I blushed with happiness. My aunt must have observed this.

"It is blue."

"Blue is very becoming to Nan."

"There will be others there.'

I stopped blushing and looked foolish.

"The poet. The palmist."

'Yes," I said irritably.

"Count Porphory."

"I know."

"Perhaps——"

"I will *not* be!" I cried nastily.

"I *wish* you to be. You promised. You *will* be there!"

"Well, then——"

Because Barker was all ears. Hang him!

"I did not mean to——"

"I know—I know——"

"You are better than all of——"

"Yes—yes——"

"There is a blue stock——"

I stared my ignorance.

"—to the blue dress."

"Oh!"

"It is a prettier blue—different—more becoming."

"Yes."

"She calls it baby-blue."

I laughed.

"Who was it told her that blue is her most becoming colour?"

I blushed.

"You never heard any of the Poor Things say so?"

"No," said I. "But that's no proof that they never said it. It's altogether likely that some of them—if

not all of them—have told her that. It's so very evident."

"She said that some one said so."

After a silence:

"I don't suppose it was you, Jock?"

"I—don't—suppose—so," said I, with guilt.

Mr. Peuter had been walking up and down, with his hands under his coat-tails. My aunt turned a little to look at him, and thus reprieved me. He turned—as he had done several times—to look at her, and their eyes met. Mr. Peuter bowed with fine courtesy. My aunt gave him a haughty little inclination. Then to me—

"Good-bye, Jock."

Mr. Peuter opened and closed the door for her.

During the rest of his promenade he looked at me with more interest than I had ever before observed.

Presently he approached the hole in the glass.

"May I ask, Mr. Merival," said he, "who that lady is?"

"My aunt," said I.

"Ah!"

With the first smile I had ever seen on Mr. Peuter's face.

XV

SAVING NAN AT TEA

"JOCK dear, aunt said you would have some advice to give me to-day. She said I wouldn't take it. Just give it to me and see if I don't! Jock, I'll like it! Oh!—after you went——"

She leaned over the narrow table, scattering the tea things with her pretty elbows—which were bare, the loose sleeve having fallen back—and regarded me in a way that always accelerated the action of my heart: She leaned a little further when I did not answer, and caught my idle paw in both her tiny hands.

"Jock! Wake up! Tickets!"

"I'm quite awake," I sighed, "but I have no ticket—to anywhere!"

"Then you must pay on the train, just like other poor and careless ones. The train of the world—of life—*me!*" She held out her hand for my fare. "I am the conductor—of your train—ours!"

"Yes—you are! And I cannot pay—I am too poor." I smiled, a bit sadly.

"Then you must get off at the next station. The rules compel me to—part with you——"

She looked a moment at my face. Then——

"Jock—you look tired. Poor old Jock! Jock—you *can* pay! You are not poor! We don't need to part—at the next station!"

I looked up at her. I *was* tired—of what? I held her hand!

"I have nothing—with which to pay—Conductor," I smiled.

"Jock—you *have!* The conductor is—a woman! Jock"—very softly—"you have a lot of things a woman cares for! Pay her and stay on the train with her!"

I raised my brows in sad inquiry.

"Sweetness—loyalty—honour—charm! Give them to her! Only a little! And you may stay!"

But, deuce take it, then she laughed!

"Aunt Izzy was right, Jock. You *are* good. Just the sort of man any sort of woman would trust on sight——"

Again the warmth at my heart. But Nan added uniquely:

"—and deceive without fear."

"Thanks!"

I meant this for irony.

"Oh, that's all right. You couldn't deny it if you wished to do so."

She slowly inventoried me.

"Those baby eyes—that lady's mouth—this big, lovely hand—all give you away. Jock, I'm sorry for you!"

Again she stopped to laugh.

"Oh, I understand. Don't look so forlorn about it. *You* can't help it. You were born that way! It's *you!* You are of no use in all this world—but just this you are putting yourself to——"

My eyes must have begged a little mercy. She ended very softly:

"—saving—*me!*"

Nan was strange that day.

"Yes," she said, dropping her chin upon her linked fingers. "And, Jock, she is not worth it."

She slowly raised her head and smiled over at me. It was divine!

"Your tea is cold."

She filled my cup till it flowed into the saucer, and then would not have stopped if I had not taken the pot from her hand. She smiled absently again.

"Jock—Jock—Jock!" Again the chin and the linked hands. "What a queer lot we are!"

"I am," I smiled.

"You *are*, Jock:"

"Mademoiselle Serious!" smiled I.

"Oh, I *am*—I am serious to-day. To-day, Jock, I long, long, long for something. I am hungry! I thirst!"

I poured her some tea. I put a biscuit before her. She did not see them at first. Then she touched them.

"Yes," she smiled, a little sadly, "if this were all!—to eat and drink!—and be merry!—and die!"

"Nan," I asked, "what else is there?"

"Everything else! To be—" She said nothing for a long minute. "—understood."

This surprised me. Nan caught it in my face.

"Oh, there isn't a soul in all this world who does not think me a hideous, frivolous, reckless, thoughtless butterfly! A girl who needs to be saved! Even you! Why, don't you know it is just that which makes girls that way? Girls like me! Jock, my dear cousin, you are different. You are like no other man I ever knew! You do not care for the things men care for—except one."

"What is the one, Nan?"

"Women! You like women, I think, because they are less brutal than men. You are not a brute. Most men are. Men's dinners do not please you. And I know why. There you drink, drink, drink! Smoke, smoke, smoke! Tell stories which your sister would not like. You are a clean man! Yes, even dainty! I do not tell you this to flatter you. It is not flattering. Women like the other kind—in the abstract. You are not a man's man at all. You are a woman's man. Perhaps you have the soul of a woman—tangled up—imprisoned—revolting—in your man's body! No, it does not make you effeminate. To real women the bravest men are the tenderest. Why are you not out in the world making money, gaining fame, wielding power? Simply because it is *you*—who do not care for these things—for whom they are not. Sometimes I fancy it is because of me—that you stay here to save me! Jock, with your woman's soul try to understand women—me! Try to believe that I do not need to be

saved! Try to believe that gaiety may be innocent—if a little fervid—and go—go your way into the world! —leaving me alone!——"

She stopped. An appalled look grew upon her face. She winked and stared as children do at waking. Then she laughed.

"No, don't go. Jock, it must have been the sibyl speaking through me! Oh! oh! oh! What was it?"

"It was something I shall not forget."

"Was it so fine?"

"It was beautiful——"

"You didn't think it of me?"

"No."

"Jock, my better self sometimes wakes up and does that. I am ashamed. But I can't always help it."

"Don't."

"I wanted you to know that I had a better self. I'm proud of that."

"Yes."

"And—since you know it, we need not bother any more about it. And you mustn't—go."

I was silent—thinking of that Nan I had seen but a moment ago—the one I had seen after the kiss—that clairvoyant communion of but a glance. And I was busily wishing that that and not this might prove to be the real out of many puzzling Nans! But—did I? Really? Was I willing to have out of the world—her life—mine—her splendid spirits?

"—and oh," Nan was saying, when I could once more hear, "she said the sweetest things about your —fealty—your manliness—your—*honour*——" She caught the fact that I had been inattentive, and finished with a laugh—"not *me*—Aunt Izzy—after you went—"

Suddenly—

"Give me your hand!"

She took it and turned my palm upward.

"It is all there! Sometimes you fancy that you ought to do some or all of these things. No use, Jock. You would only waste time. Your fate is to be just what you are—and in the end to be left out in the cold."

She laughed a trifle hardly.

"Jock, you have an inconvenient thing there—for a man."

She leaned a little further and tapped on the bosom of my shirt in the cardiac region.

"Now, what do you see in mine?"

I took the lovely pink thing she offered me. I know nothing about palmistry. But I said:

"And you have not the inconvenient thing."

"Not at all?" she laughed.

"Not at all."

"I told you it was not worth while to save me."

"I did not agree to that."

"Jock, you must have been your mother's darling!"

I showed the sudden offence I felt at this irreverent use of the name of my mother.

"Jock," she whispered, "I didn't mean it that way. Forgive me, anyhow!"

She rose and went to the window. I followed her contritely.

"I understand, Nan," I said.

"No, Jock, you don't—no more than the rest!"

We were both silent for a moment. Then she flashed round upon me in a way I had never seen before.

"What right had you to think that *I* was capable of using the name of your dead mother irreverently?"

Again a little silence. Then Nan suddenly said:

"God bless her!"

"For what?"

"For you."

XVI

WHEN A WOMAN IS ENGAGED TO TWO, SHE SHOULD MARRY ONLY ONE

IT was so sudden—so innocent, so altogether splendid! I looked at Nan. She was looking down at the spoon she was jangling against a cup. I laughed and found myself. Nan was simply—Nan! I had gone to the window. She had returned then. Now I stood over her.

"Nan, I'm afraid I need saving as much as you do."

I found that my voice was a trifle husky—hang it all!

"More," agreed Nan, solemnly.

I held out my hands in agreement. She took them and laughed with divine richness, looking up at me.

"Jock," she said demurely, "when a woman has promised to marry two men, what should she do?"

"Marry only one of them."

"Which?"

"The one she loves,"

"And no matter about the other? Suppose he loves her—the one she does not love?"

"Let him love her."

"And marry the other one?"

"Certainly."

"Suppose she should marry *him*——"

"And love the other one?"

"Yes."

"Never do."

"What's sauce for the gander——"

"Who is the woman?"

"I."

"Who are the men?"

"I don't think you have a right to ask. Anyhow, I don't mean to tell."

"You forget that you agreed——"

"Yes—I'll tell——!"

But she did not; and as I thought of all those we called the "Poor Things" I grew savage.

"—sometime," finished Nan, laughing at me.

"Nan, you ought to be ashamed to think of throwing yourself away on *any* of them."

"Yes."

"Well, who *are* they?"

"Cawdor—and——"

"Yes! Out with it! Who is the other?'

"*You.*"

We flew apart and stared a moment, but then, I am happy to say, we both laughed.

Without speaking, Nan drifted back to the tea-table. I followed her. She looked across at me out of the tops of her eyes, smiling a little.

"I was engaged to Cawdor at seven and to you at—Well, I was much older. And don't you think that the engagement to you when I was so much older is the more binding?"

"I'll consult counsel," I laughed.

"Wasn't it lovely!"

"I don't remember."

"You *do!* It's extremely impolite to not remember—our first engagement! Oh, *your* only one!"

"This one makes two, thank you."

"Oh, what a place to become engaged! In a graveyard! You sat on a tombstone! I sat——"

"Well—where?"

"You know perfectly well. And we ought to be ashamed. I was well along in years then. Twelve!"

"But we're *not* ashamed?"

This was irony again.

"No!" cried Nan, glowingly. "If you had married me then, you wouldn't have to save me now."

"Who would be doing it, then?"

She laughed and recklessly pulled my hand across

the table to her, making a noisy swath through the china.

I withdrew my hand.

"Cawdor—for *me*, I suppose," I said.

"Jock, what are you going to do with me?"

"Keep you—as the apple of his eye."

"He'll have one too many."

"I am going to appear whenever 'the others' are likely to."

"Especially the count?"

"Especially."

"The Two Dromios!"

"Banquo's Ghost!"

"All that trouble to save me from——'

"*For*—the Church of England!"

"How sweet of you!"

"Not sweet—but important."

"Jock, you don't like me. Oh, well, when I'm an archbishopress you'll be proud of me. I'll be proud of myself, Jock. You may sit on the front porch."

Again came suddenly, after such a thing, that strange, new, fugitive, piteous plea into Nan's face—just a flash.

"Jock, do you—really—think I need to be saved? *Is* it important—for Cawdor?"

She whispered it with something like begging—reproach—I know not exactly what—in her voice. Again I put myself in opposition to her mood—and felt like a brute for it.

"The evidence is against you, Nan," I laughed. "I must decide according to the evidence and not my own—feelings!"

She sighed with a piteous little air of disappointment.

"You're just in time."

Then I wanted to get back from her small hardness to the other mood. It was too late.

"Nan, dear, the world was saying——"

She stopped me with a hand upon my mouth and some of the fingers in it.

"I know. But it has given me you for Count Porphory and Glück and the 'Poor Things'—and I am content—and—and you must bear it—for a little while

—for Aunt Izzy—and Cawdor!—and—*me*—and the church—and the whole wo—orld!"

"Nan," I began, "you're the most——"

"You mean the worst. I know. But you are saving me. Have faith. I have. We'll show the world!"

As we looked into the face of each other, a splendid smile grew upon Nan's. I suppose mine in some fashion reproduced it.

"Jock, you broke your contract."

"I?"

"You! You broke it first. The little sweetheart word, 'Nan dear!' So 'unnecessary'!" She whispered it over to me laughing.

"Oh!"

"Jock, you're blushing!"

"I'm not!"

She moved her head aside. There was a mirror behind her. I saw my face.

"*Don't* be sorry. I forgive you. I'll make Cawdor forgive you, too."

"I am *not* blushing!"

"But—behold!" She let me have the mirror again: The proof was there. Nan looked too this time. Our faces were side by side in the glass.

XVII

WHEN I USED TO BLUSH

'YOU used to blush—long, long ago—when we were children. *You* blushed more than I did."

"Girls are little brutes," I said savagely.

"Yes—*little* girls are little brutes. I used to make you snuggle just to *see* you blush. Do you remember? I wouldn't do it now—just to see you blush."

"I remember everything!"

"Not the Ark?—and the Flood? You're not that old?"

'Not quite."

"We *did* snuggle, didn't we?"

"*Yes*—if *you* choose to remember it."

She smiled divinely.

"And now you're sitting on one side of this horrid table, and I on the other—drinking *tea!* Just because you wear a long frock-coat and I a long frock!"

Nan sighed. I wanted to and did not. This I lay up in my favour.

"Jock, we used to drink out of the little streams then—and springs! *Water!* Oh, such delicious water! There has been none like it since! None! None anywhere! Oh, sometimes it tasted of herbs—mint or sassafras or thyme! And the smell of the flowers all about—wild roses, honeysuckle, violets. We'd lie right down on the ground and put our dear little faces into the water! You'd *always* tell me to hold my nose shut! And you'd hold *me*—oh, put your arm tight—tight about me—so that I wouldn't overbalance—and fall in—and drown! This way, Jock!" She illustrated.

I shuddered away from Nan. I saw it all, and could have shouted with delight that Nan did. But I brought forth a cracked laugh.

"Drown!" I gibed. "Why, there never was a spring or stream on the old farm that was more than a foot deep! You'd have to lie flat to drown!"

"*You* said it, Jock. *I* never understood the vast danger—or saw it. *You* were always anxious that I should not—dri—drown! Or be bitten by sni—snakes!"

Then something that might be sob or laugh!

Nan had outflanked me, and I surrendered.

"It *was* beautiful," I said.

"Jock!"

"*Very* beautiful," I repeated.

"Then why have you been so nasty about it?"

"To—save you—me," I laughed.

"Oh, I don't want to be saved—from *that!* To-day! Please—Jock! It is too lovely. Jock, I want to do it all again. I am hungry for it! Hungry—hungry—hungry!"

I had to go light again:

"Thirsty, you said?"

This was always a dangerous thing to do to Nan.

"Jock, you must never call me 'dear' again. I forgave you for that, but—it is too sweet—for—frivolity."

She was piling some cubes of sugar into a tiny fortification.

"Me too," laughed I. "You called *me*——"

"But you're my fiancé."

She was twisting my ring about her finger.

"And you are mine."

"Cousin Jock, you're very sweet to me."

She said it solemnly.

"Sometimes I wish I were anything but your cousin." I said it harshly.

"A stone, for instance?"

"Yes."

"So that you couldn't see nor hear nor be touched by *me?* Oh, Jock!"

I said nothing.

"How you must hate me!"

I did not deny it.

"I don't blame you. A girl who must be saved——"

She gave me an opportunity to refute this self-impeachment, but I did not.

Nan smiled over at me her perilously divine smile.

"Have some sugar?" she begged.

"You know I never——"

"Yes. But to-day—just to please me—when I am so sad!" All with protean coaxing.

"Sad," I laughed.

"I *am* sad! I *will* be sad!"

"*No!*"

"One—tiny—lump!"

"You will spoil my tea!"

She selected it from her fortification and reached over to put it into my cup. I stopped her midway. The sugar fell to the table. She let her hand remain in mine. I opened my palm. It lay there like a bejeweled flower. Nan had out-manœuvred me again. Well—I was glad of it. I put my lips upon the small, pulsing thing I held. Nan smiled radiantly.

"Sometimes you are not a bit nasty to me," said she, with winsome softness.

"Sometimes!" I think I sighed.

"Jock, can you remember *now?*—all those things about the old farm?"

"Yes."

"But—you're forgetting one thing?"

"What?"

"Cawdor."

There was a ring at the door. Nan took back her hand in haste.

"Count Porphory!" said she. "I know his ring."

"You are wearing mine!"

She took it off and tendered it to me. I refused it.

"I shall stay till he goes!" I threatened.

A sudden, resistless radiance seemed to possess her face. Nan immediately quelled it.

"Oh, *will* you? How *sweet!* But of *course.* I

forgot the—terms. Shall I introduce you as my fiancé ?"

Was the radiance for me ?

"He's an ass !"

"Yes—but shall I ? And let him say things about *you ?*"

"You said you did not want him if you could have —er—me."

"Yes, but—he proposed first. If you hadn't been so—poky—*Cousin* Jock !"

"Count Porphory !" announced the man.

I saw him kiss the hand I had just kissed !

XVIII

NAN MUST MAKE LOVE—WHEN IT'S MADE!

AFTER he was gone—immediately:

"*I* am going," I said, with immense frigidity. "He kissed your hand!"

"So did you—Jock! First! You are always—first."

Nan put up a timorous, childishly appealing face. Something in her eyes begged and repented. I was adamant. As I rose I smashed a tea-cup.

"Break them all!" she cried, bringing her teeth together savagely.

"I am not a vandal," I said, with added coldness.

"They are from his potteries in Vienna."

With an instant, irresistible impulse I raised my arm to sweep the whole lovely collection into one heap of ruins. I would have done it had I not at that moment seen the almost savage joy which flashed into Nan's face, puzzling me quite as the radiance had done. I withheld my arm—there in the air.

"Do it!" cried Nan, with almost my own abandon. "Do it! Oh, *please*——"

She caught my arm and tried to use it fiercely in the fashion of a club. I resisted. She kept it there—still in the air. With the other hand I took up one of the pieces and held it to the light.

"They are exquisite," I said. "He has good taste——"

"In pottery," sighed Nan.

"In women," sighed I.

She let my arm go. It dropped. And almost—without my volition or Nan's knowledge—it formed

itself about Nan's waist—almost. Nan drooped away and back to her former place at the table, from where she looked up at me with her chin in her hands. I could not tell what her eyes were saying. It was so much!

"I had to have some one—to go about with—before you came," said Nan at last. "And now—— In Europe they all do that—kiss our hands." She looked at them curiously. "*I* don't know why!"

I did. But I determined that she should not hear it—as I fancied she wished.

"That china was expensive," I said.

"Not to him. He makes it, you know."

"You should not have allowed him——"

"No," very humbly. "But—I *wouldn't* take a—ring."

"You are to go about with me hereafter," I said. "You have gone too far with Porphory."

"You think that safer, Jock dear, don't you?"—with a subtle amazement.

"I certainly do."

"How strange!"

She sighed.

"Strange?"

"You *are* safe, Jock—quite. It is not *strange!*"

I stared offensively. I saw the little bravado that I knew come into her eyes.

"You almost *never* make love to me."

"Almost!" I am afraid I rather shouted it. "I *never* make love to you."

"No. Pardon me. *I* always have to make it—when it's made."

She did not look up. Her tone was not in the least flippant. Indeed, it seemed sad.

"*I* NEVER shall make love to *you!*"

The light of battle woke in Nan's eyes.

"How very sad!" she laughed, "—for—*you*."

"Never!" I repeated, in the sort of protestation, I fear, which is the more vehement as the sense of peril is the more acute.

I think Nan detected both me and this. She laughed like a lovely little demon.

"Who's afraid!" she blustered, in what she probably thought my fashion, but which was only a very pretty invention of her own.

"All right—we'll see!" said I.

"Yes—we'll *see*, Jock, my dear old dull cousin. Why—at this very moment—here—now!—if I were to *let* you! It is *I* who do *not* make love, sir! Jock—Jock—Jock! You *are* dull! And it's—lovely! We couldn't go on this way if you weren't."

"You talk as if a woman couldn't exist without love!" I thundered—the last mutterings of the storm.

"She can't."

She only laughed at me. I rose to go. I fear I showed resentment.

"Don't be angry, Jock," said Nan, following me. "You know you are all I have now—tu, antiquâ homo virtute et fide."

But she didn't mean a word of it.

She slipped her hand into mine. We went that way toward the door. She began to swing our hands. She laughed.

"It's so hard to break up old habits. Just like when we were kids!"

I closed my hand on hers and—well—joined her irresistible mood.

"The idea of a woman not being able to exist without love!" laughed I.

"Are you still thinking about *that?*"

"Yes."

"Jock, it wasn't quite right, I suppose."

"Why, of course not. Many women——"

"*Exist* without love? Yes—but that is all. They *have* to because no one loves them. But they all *want* to be loved. Poor things! I couldn't even exist without it, though."

"Like a pretty flower without the sun!" I gibed. "Would it wither and die?"

"Yes."

She whispered it very seriously.

Still I gibed—glad for my turn.

"But, Nan, you *do* exist."

She made as if she would answer, but recalled it and did not.

"And you are distressingly healthy."

She still kept silent.

"And full of colour—and joy—and perfume—not pale and anaemic and scentless as a flower deprived of the sun would——"

"I am loved," she said very low.

I was shocked into a moment's silence by this too frank avowal—perhaps—perhaps by something else too vague and difficult to make plain then.

In addition, the count came back to my mind.

"Porphory!" I cried savagely.

She did not deny nor affirm me. Instead, she said—now with a little hopeless laugh:

"And I love."

"Porphory!" I said again. "Damn him!"

"You must go," said Nan, pushing me into the hall.

I resisted a little.

"*I* have a word to say."

"You must go, *Cousin* Jock! You've said it. It was damn. Thank you."

But I held my ground and she stopped pushing.

"What have you to say further, *Cousin* Jock—for the good of this lodge in particular, or the cause of masonry in general?"

"Remember Cousin Cawdor!"

'Did *you* forget him? Is it 'Wolf! Wolf?'"

She asked it with deliciously arched eyebrows and a charming upward inflection.

I felt myself reddening about the eyes.

"Stop it, Jock! It is too womanly."

"Did you mean him?—and not Porphory? If it is he—all right."

But I said it with a difficulty which surprised me.

"Why, Jock! You certainly don't expect me to confess—who——"

"Well—*he* is—somebody. Porph——"

"I fancy he is. But he is all the time writing his sermons and things—I—suppose. Isn't that what he does?"

"Cawdor? I don't know," I said irritably.

"Anyhow, he has no time to love—as yet. Perhaps after his ordination——"

"And you have too much!" I thundered righteously.

"Hinc illae lachrymae!"

"Yes."

She smiled her celestial smile.

"That's the reason I'm giving so much of it away—to—to you."

"Much?"

"Of my *time*. Don't worry, Jock! Only *time!*"

"Nan," said I, quite brutally, "what the deuce do you mean?"

She looked up questioningly.

"It is the crux amantium, Jock!"

"If you're amusing yourself with me, it's a waste of time—I mean it's—— Well, excuse me. I'll be hanged if I understand you! Why should you say—such—lovely things to *me?*"

She was walking away from me a little, looking backward and downward at the train of her gown.

"She *can't* cut a train—that is certain. Still—— How do you like it?"

I laughed and recovered—as I suppose she expected.

"I liked it as soon as I heard about it."

Now she laughed.

"Who told you?"

"Aunt Izzy."

"The count has seen me in every frock I have. I was ashamed." She now turned and backed charmingly into the train, looking like a little fashion-plate. She glanced first down the right side of the draperies, then down the left. "If it were not for that dreadfully cut train it would be lovely—I should be quite satisfied with it."

"Let me see that dreadful train!"

She paced away from me, then back, and again swathed herself in the soft and splendid garment, like a statue—all with ineffable grace.

"There is not a thing wrong with it!" said I, in the

enthusiasm her prettiness—not the frock—gave me. "It's beautiful!"

"Do you really like it?"

She seemed preternaturally glad.

"Yes."

"The train too?"

She exhibited the train again. Again she exhibited the perfection of herself.

"It's perfect!"

Of course I meant that she was. But she didn't know that.

"Men *are* queer. The count did too."

"Meant that *you* were perf——" I began in instant ferocity.

She laughed. She opened the door and put me out. She let me see her gay face for a moment in the last six inches as it closed upon her.

"*Cousin* Jock!"

She was leaning out of the window as I passed.

"Nan!"

"Yes! It is dreadful to make you risk the dislocation of your neck. But I forgot. I am going with Count Porphory to-morrow night—to *Faust*. It is an old engagement. Unless—unless— I really have no excuse to send him, dear *Cousin* Jock!"

"The excuse you will send him," said I, with immense severity, "is that"—I fear I struck a rather stagy attitude—"you are going with *me!*"

She leaned a little farther out of the window and clapped her hands in applause.

"Oh, Jock—dear Cousin Jock! you *do* remember!"

"Perfectly!" I said grimly.

"Jock!" she commanded, "be glad!"

I rebelled.

"*Please* be glad!" she begged.

I tried to frown, but, hang it! I am sure I smiled. At all events, Nan smiled down upon me.

"Jock," she said, "come closer."

I did so.

"A little closer. I want to say something confidential."

I took my place against the wall.

"Too close. I can see only the top of your head. And isn't it funny! Did you ever see any one from his top this way? With all his features foreshortened? No perspective? And a little bald spot!"

I moved out and faced her. No man can stand that sort of thing.

Then she bent downward till I feared a catastrophe for her, and whispered to me:

"Jock! You don't mean to be sweet to me. I suppose you think you are not. But all the same—you are! Vale! Pax vobiscum!"

I strode away mightily. I heard her laugh. I fancied hearing her call my name in a whisper. I wanted to look around—if the truth must be told—but I did not—until I reached the corner. She was still at the window. Her hand was at her lips. As I looked it left them and flung out toward me. Quite without a thought on my part, my own flung out toward her. Then I anathematized myself and darted around the corner as if for safety. I walked slowly. I wanted to go back. There was no excuse. I laughed at myself—and, rebelling at something within, went back and cautiously peered around the corner at the window. It was closed.

I felt like a fool. I looked about to see whether I had been observed. Yes! Some boys had stopped—wondering at me. Pulling my cuffs into place, I stalked away—indeed remembering Cawdor and calling myself unhandsome names.

XIX

I DO AND I DON'T—LOVE NAN

THROUGH the hole in the glass before me and my ledger once more Aunt Izzy said—

"Jock, I want to speak to you!"

I waited—trembling. My aunt was warlike.

"Privately!"

Mr. Peuter was again passing, and my aunt's suggestion was sufficiently strenuous to attract his attention.

"Mr. Merival," said he, "take your—aunt, I think it is?"—he smiled an interrogation to Aunt Izzy and bowed in a fine old-fashioned way, and Aunt Izzy gave him back his smile with a finer bow—"into my private office."

Barker dropped his pen, making a blot on his ledger. I heard Mr. Peuter saying as we left the vicinity—

"Stop that! We permit no erasures in our books. A clerk who is so stupid——"

My aunt looked thoughtfully back at Mr. Peuter as he closed the door upon us. I fancied that she smiled. But her back was toward me.

Aunt Izzy kept her starers upon me for at least two minutes. Then she suddenly said—

"Jock—you love Nancy!"

Some good demon made me laugh—at Aunt Izzy.

"No—you don't!"

The same demon must have helped me to another and bigger laugh—a trifle nervous now.

"Then—I do and I don't!"

"You don't. No man who loves a woman can stand that test. I had it all planned. To spring it in that sudden way, you know. He will blush if he is

young enough—look foolish if he is too old—confused if neither too old nor too young. But he will never *laugh* unless he is——"

"Innocent!"

"Jock! there is no question of *guilt!* But of good faith. You are *not* to love Nancy!"

"Now that you know that I do not love her—rest your soul, dear aunt—what?"

"She *can't* have taken a—fancy to *you!* Especially as you don't care for her."

"Impossible!"

"Yes. But she's very capable of making you *think* she has!"

"She'd never take the trouble—for me."

"Has she tried it?"

I looked an interrogation.

"To make you think she lo—likes you?"

"I haven't noticed it."

"Then she hasn't. You'd notice it. But I can't understand her moods!"

"Describe them. Perhaps I can help you to do so."

"Why—she is *sweet!*—at times."

"I knew that long ago!" I announced, with a pride which escaped my aunt.

"It's your own discovery, then. And you've kept it to yourself. When, sir, did you first notice it?"

Aunt Izzy was quite inquisitorial again.

"When we were very small children. Remember, aunt dear, that we were playmates."

"Nonsense!" laughed my aunt—much relieved. "Sweetness is not—dangerous then."

Silence. Then—

"That was only one mood. What of the rest?"

"She has a thousand!"

"More than that!"

"She flew at me and kissed me as I started to come here."

"Was it the first time?"—pityingly.

"Yes—in that way. I have always had to insist upon it—as a duty. And she has always done it—as a duty."

"And you didn't *like* it? Heavens!"

My amazement was slain by Aunt Izzy's retort.

"Yes—I did. Didn't *you?*" Then she softened. "She is so lovely—her arms felt splendid—about my neck! It seemed as if she were at peace—happy—content—with all the world! My flitting Nancy! Jock, something has made her very happy."

I did not answer.

"They tell me I was like her—at her age."

Aunt Izzy came suddenly out of her abstraction and caught a wonder-look in my eyes.

"Don't look so appalled, Jock. I am not a fright—even now!"

"A fright! By no means, dear aunt. I'm glad you begin to know it," said I.

Her face softened prettily.

"But I told her she must be less impulsive. She must kiss me only when I invite her. *No* one should kiss another without an invitation. And, above all"—my aunt became once more the inquisitor—"that she must *never* love you!"

She put on her severity look for me, and repeated—for me—

"No one! Never!"

"She invited me, aunt—indeed she did! To seal our betrothal."

"Of course!"

Irony from Aunt Izzy! I gave her some more.

"It was a shame to tell her that. Let her kiss—and be hanged!"

"Yes, hanged!" laughed my aunt. "Jock, you've made a great change in her. I can't think of any other reason for it than you."

"If you could, would you?"

"Decidedly. I don't like either her or myself to be under such heavy obligations to *you*."

"I shan't presume upon them. I'm only a poor relation to both of you!" I laughed.

My aunt ignored this gaucherie with proper dignity.

"She's better in every way. She's happy! She sings—laughs—dances—more! She begged me to hurry

back—so that she would not get lonely! Me! When she had her arms about my neck that way! Isn't that strange?"

"I hope that you said you would? We are in Mr. Peuter's territory."

"I did!—*not* on Mr. Peuter's account!"

"Oh! you will be glad to get back?"

"Yes!"

She laughed happily.

"I wonder if my aunt isn't changed a little too?"

"Not a bit! Not a bit!"

She brusquely put up her guard.

"That's just it! Now, at last, I understand! You have taken all the others away and *keep* them away. But you are not sufficient to supply their vacant places entirely. That accounts for her loneliness. Her happiness is due to her relief from their importunities. They are complex. You are simple. Don't you see?"

I admitted sadly that I saw.

"And she is happy making a fool of you—just as she did of them. It is better fun for her because you are nobler game! And easier! And only one! Yes, that is it! You are all the rest—three or four—concentrated in one. And it will be three or four times as hard for you, and three or four times as funny for her. Poor Jock! Nan will expect you to be three or four times as much a fool as either of them—all of them. And she will be three or four times as foolish."

I tried to reflect Aunt Izzy's air of calamity.

"What shall we do?"

"Let her go—she's all right now—only keeping her in the path—till Cawdor comes! But be on your guard——"

"Against what?"

"Her sweetness."

"Yes. Oh, I am! All the time! Never fear!"

"Cawdor will be equal to her!"

I hoped so. But I began to doubt it a little. I said the former to my aunt—not the latter.

"I am glad you appreciate the necessity. When she is that way—intimate—emotional—lonely—tem-

pestuous—indiscreet in her speech—and, sometimes, in her actions—I've heard her swear!—*you* must pass it over as if you didn't notice it—or didn't understand her purpose—or didn't care—or as if you were indifferent—— Nothing so maddens a girl as indifference. That's it!"

"But she must be cured!" said I righteously, "not maddened."

"That is curative too. As the doctor used to say, 'Similia similibus curantur!' Madness cures madness."

"How would it do to appear bored?"

This was irony. Bored! By Nan!

"Splendid! Better than indifference! I see that you understand thoroughly how to save her. Then she cannot possibly make the mistake of supposing that you care for her! She must not think that for one moment. And yet, the little minx has always fancied everybody who looked at her was in love with her. She might fancy that about even *you!* Yes, that is it. Promise me that you will appear bored!"

My aunt was cyclonic. I am afraid I promised.

"I must go. Kiss me!"

I did. And just at that moment Mr. Peuter entered in search of a paper. He made some rather vague excuses. He did not find the paper.

"No matter," said Aunt Izzy, curiously happy, "we were just through. I thank you for the courtesy of your office." My aunt looked about her. There were some summer clothes behind the door. Here and there were evidences—plain even to me—of bachelor unthrift. "It is a snug little nest. Not at all like the doctor's—ahem! I wish you would not be *too* severe with my nephew if he sometimes goes early and comes late. He is engaged upon a most noble thing for me—nothing less than the saving of his cousin Nancy from a lot of other scamps—who are after her money—and—and herself!"

"Now, my dear madam, you don't say so!"

Mr. Peuter turned and looked at me with a newer and more beaming interest.

"You have no idea how capable he is!"

"Pardon me, madam, but we have—all of us. If any of us can do anything to help to save his cousin—er—your nephew is a most charming person, madam!"

My aunt smiled engagingly. I wondered if I had heard aright. I wished Barker could have heard that! No one in the bank had ever before said a good word of me. No one had, in fact, ever said so many to me at one time. And this was the president! I decided not to tell Barker. I knew that he would ask sarcastically what charm had to do with keeping a cash ledger. And he might argue, from that, that I was prevaricating. I should not tell him.

After my aunt had gone Mr. Peuter remained a moment, twirling his glasses. There was a pink flush under his eyes which was really very good to see. He was a fine-looking man, anyhow.

"Er—Mr. Merival—is your aunt unmarried?" he asked.

I gave him a prompt and adequate yes—perhaps too prompt and too adequate.

"You may go, sir."

It was quite in the savage bank manner. Hang it! Why should the fact that my aunt was a widow make him such a brute to me? It made me brutal. I told Barker to shut up when he undertook to guy me, and I didn't mention the other matter at all.

XX

FIRST AND LAST—BUT NOT ALL THE TIME

"BUT, my dear Cousin Jock," Nan wrote a week later, "Count Porphory is coming to-morrow, and there will be no chaperon, I fear. I didn't ask him to come. He just said he would. He's so—so—dictatorial. And so what could I do? Not decline to see him! Could I, Cousin Jock, dear? You wish me to be polite—and hospitable. You said so. Or maybe it wasn't you. It may have been him. But, at any rate, I ought to—don't you think? So, you see—unless you get here first? I hate tête-à-têtes—except with relatives—when no one cares. At any rate, you have not saved me for nearly a week. A little before five o'clock, Jock dear, please—and tea, you know—and biscuits—and Latin."

I got there first and left last.

"Cousin Jock, dear," said Nan, as I was leaving, "you saved me more to-day than ever before!" She tried to be impressive. "I was so lonely. Oh, it was shivery! And blue! And sad! De profundis! Dies irae—sort of day!"

"Is it possible!" I gibed, with the irony which always failed.

"Cousin Jock, do you like my hand?"

I dropped it instantly, conscious that I had been holding it a long time. I got warm. Nan looked at it with a regret that was comical.

"But I don't mind—not a bit!"

She offered me the hand.

I did not retake it.

"Oh! Are you remembering?"

"Yes!"

"That seems like forgetting."

"I don't understand you."

"Why, how am I to know about those things when Cawdor comes for me—unless—you—forget to remember—now and then?"

She twisted my ring about her finger.

"Cousin Jock, please don't leave me alone so long again. I can't be saved in that way."

"Nonsense!" I laughed.

"Well, you'll see! You know I have never been left alone so long as that. Do you expect me to make sacrifices—for *you?* My cousin?"

"No—for *him*—your cousin."

"Which him?"

"The one you spoke of so frantically the other day."

"Jock, was that the reason you stayed away?"

"No. What do I care who it is!"

She was silent a moment. Then, with an accent of calamity, she said—

"Cousin Jock, do you mean that? That you don't care who it is—who loves me—whom I love?"

"Well—no, Nan. I want it to be some good fellow—some one who deserves you."

"Yes. *That's* all right. It *is*—that—sort—of fellow, Cousin Jock! He does deserve me. I—Cousin Jock—I don't deserve *him!*"

"Nonsense, Nan!"

"Honest, Jock—I *don't.*"

"The deuce! The very deuce! Then it can't be either the count or any of the Poor Things. Why, it must be some one I don't know!"

Nan shook her head with a half smile.

"No, you don't know him," she said.

"But, Nan dear," I said, taking both her hands, "you ought to tell me. You should trust me. I am your best friend—though I confess that I don't always seem so. Won't you honour me with your confidence?"

"Yes," said Nan, very softly.

But she did not, and I asked—

"When?"

"As soon as he tells me he loves me."

"But you said he had?"

She shook me a negative, with the half smile again:

"I only said that he loved me."

"But how did you know?"

"Oh, in a thousand ways. A woman has certain senses which a man has not—when it is a matter of love. She reads the eyes—the tones—the paling and flushing of the face—his comings and goings. Some day he will tell me, and then you shall know—you shall know first of all!"

"Before Aunt Izzy?"

"Oh, yes!"

"And it shall not interrupt our friendship?"

"Oh, no! He knows all about that. And he likes it—as long as it is nothing but—friendship!"

She walked away, then swiftly back.

"You must go."

"Tell me one thing more. Aunt evidently knows nothing of this affair."

"Not a thing."

'Does she know the man?"

'She has seen him."

"What is he like?"

"You'll play fair? You won't tell Aunt Izzy?"

"No."

We were standing before the mirror in the hall-stand. Nan, with a momentary hesitation, began absently to polish this with her handkerchief. I watched her face as she did it. I saw her suddenly look up and smile at mine as it was imaged beside her own. Thus we stood a moment, smiling at each other in the mirror. Then suddenly she pushed me away from it.

"Suppose we could go through the looking glass to the other side? We would find a stone wall, wouldn't we?"

"Yes," I said.

She laughed at me.

"Jock, you must go!"

"But you haven't told me."

"I'm ashamed now."

"But you said he was——"

"Something like you, dear, dear Cousin Jock—at times he is so dull——"

"Do you think me dull?"—in dudgeon.

"Oh, sometimes," she laughed—not very gaily.

"Well, I'm glad it's not to spoil our comradeship."

"It will never do that!"

"Not even after he tells you?"

"Not even—if he—should ask me—to marry him!"

"Or if you *should* marry him?"

"Not even then. Oh, Jock, go! go! go! or we'll go through the glass and find nothing on the other side—but a stone wall."

I was on the step when she spoke again.

"Don't wait so long to save me," Nan laughed.

"Please don't see him—till you see me again—will you?"

She seemed to hesitate: The roguery was all come back.

"Oh, well——"

I was going.

"Do you know how long it has been? One hundred and forty-four hours!"

"I didn't think you knew so much arithmetic!"

"I had such a long time to do the sum in. It is eight thousand six hundred and forty minutes!"

"Heavens! How many seconds?"

I fancied this would stagger her.

"Five hundred and eighteen thousand four hundred!"

"And you can't add your bank book!"

I rushed away in simulated affright.

"Don't let him know that you know so much arithmetic, or he will stop loving you."

"I think it ought to make him love me more."

"Never! Men hate women who can calculate."

"The days and hours and minutes and seconds that he has been away?—when he will come again?"

"Oh!"

I think I *am* dull. But Nan brought me safely around.

"We were talking about—Cawdor—and mirrors and love and stone walls," she laughed. "Weren't we?"

"Oh! I see! It is Cawdor! He writes to you! You write to him!"

"Yes."

"Nan, I'm glad," I said.

"Are you? Truly? Jock, perhaps, after all, I am mistaken. Perhaps he doesn't love me. He's so—strange!"

The calamity look was in her face again.

"Well, he shall!" I cried. "I'll make him."

"Yes—make him," smiled Nan.

"Just you tell me who——"

"Cousin Jock, I will not see him till I see you again—if you come very soon."

"In a day or two!"

"Yes!"

"And then you will tell me."

"The moment he tells me."

"Nan"—I took her dear hands—"you are giving him a great deal. No man has ever been given so much. But the best of men are brutes—beside such a woman as—you. Do not be too sanguine. He may never tell you! Most men do not appreciate women—like you!"

Something very lovely showed in Nan's face.

"Yes, he will," she whispered.

To my look she whispered again—

"He can't help it—some day!"

Then, very suddenly, she closed the door upon me. I thought I heard a quick gasp—then a little sob. But it may have been Nan's sudden laughter. Fancy! At least I thought it was—must be—laughter. Why should Nan sob? *I* felt more like it than she.

XXI

SUPPOSE NAN HAD TO BE SAVED BY TELEGRAPH?

I DID not go to see Nan again for more than a week. The idea of the suitor who had her love had suddenly grown a morbid thought to me. I still heard that last laughter—if that is what it was. It still hurt a little.

Then I got a telegram from a near-by office.

"Want to see you immediately. Very important," it said. "Con amore.—NAN."

I hurried into a coat and off to her. She exhibited no signs of distress. On the contrary, she was vexatiously gay—and I out of breath!

"I just wanted to see if you would come," smiled Nan, joyously, "and how quickly. Now I know that you can always be depended upon."

"Nan," I roared, "do you mean that it is not important?"

"Suppose I needed to be saved very suddenly?"

I was busy keeping my wrath within.

"By telegraph!"

By this time I could glare at her.

"Don't you see the importance?"

I laughed hurriedly.

"Stop it!" commanded Nan, with a stamp of her foot. "There are people looking on. I can be as angry as you—before people!"

"More so."

"Jock, this is not the way to save me—after a whole week of *not* saving me. You ought to know

that. I can be perfectly—reckless! Go! I don't like you to-day. I hate you! Go! Then *I* will!"

She flew toward the door.

"Nan dear," I said, forsaking my heroics and eating my humble pie as gracefully but unmistakably as possible, "I beg your pardon. Yes, you are always important. Yes!"

On the instant she was radiant.

"That's my dear old Cousin Jock come back!" She went to the door, as if to leave some one out. "Shoo!" she said. "There goes the other nasty new Jock, whom neither of us likes" She came laughing back to me. "And for penance—which I horridly deserve—I'll take the nice old Cousin Jock back to his musty old office."

"But, Nan," I undertook to remonstrate, "business——"

"But, Cousin Jock, this is nicer than business."

I said nothing. But it was.

"Isn't it, Jock?"

"Nan," said I, "I didn't invite you to go back with me."

"No," she said cheerfully, catching step. "Who's afraid of Mr. Peuter. Why, he's quite one of us! Jock," she asked, "do you remember how long it has been since that other Jock has been to see me?"

"What other Jock?"

"The one I put out."

"Oh! No."

"Eight days—one hundred and ninety-two hours—eleven thousand five hundred and twenty minutes—six hundred and ninety-one thousand two hundred seconds."

"I am convicted by your arithmetic," I laughed.

"Yes! You promised and broke it. To *Me!*"

"I'll do anything on earth to mend it!"

"Will you?"

She was curiously eager.

"I swear it!"

"Then come to morrow *really*—in place of the to-morrow you didn't! Good-bye!"

I caught my breath. Nan was gone—never looking back to where I stared—leaving only the perfume of violents in the air—and a certain disappointed hunger somewhere inside me.

XXII

WHAT HATH (FOR "GOD" READ) LOVE WROUGHT!

WHEN, according to my promise, I got to Nan's house on the following evening, Mr. Peuter was in the parlour. Nan was in a prim chair—detached—as far away as possible. Aunt Izzy was telling something which made her lean toward Peuter. Nan signalled with a finger. Mr. Peuter grasped my hand.

"There was a little error in your cash to-day," said the president, fishing for something in his breast pocket. "I had a memorandum made of it, and stopped on my way home to let you——"

I was wondering why he should seek me there. Aunt Izzy detected the thought.

"I told him you spent most of your spare time here," she explained.

"Why, when did you see him?" I asked innocently.

Aunt Izzy hesitated only an instant. Then she told me the truth without a blush. She knew the value of truth in such a situation.

"I went to the bank to see you the day before yesterday. You were not in, and Mr. Peuter kindly— I waited in his office——"

"Yes!" corroborated our president, with a huge smile. "I gave myself the pleasure of entertaining your aunt with a little conversation."

"Oh!"—both aunt and the president knew my hours there—"it is strange that you should have missed me?"

"Yes!"

The president again:

"And that nothing was said——"

"Yes!"

Mr. Peuter began to look as displeased as he did about a blot, and I began to cringe. Such a thing as an error in the cash had heretofore been held to demand some sort of torture at the bank. I had never had one. This was the first I had heard of this one.

"You are very kind," I said to Mr. Peuter.

"Stop it!" whispered Nan. "You *are* dull!"

"Not at all—not at all! It is my business to catch you young rascals up! And matters like this should have the promptest attention. I cannot now find the memorandum. But no matter—no matter. To-morrow will do."

And he laughed as I had never heard him laugh in my sixteen years in the bank.

My subsidence pleased everybody.

"And, by the way, Mr. Merival, I think—so does your aunt—that your service to us entitles you to more consideration—ahem! recognition, sir, recognition—than you have had. I assure you it has been because *you* have been entirely too modest to ask for what you deserve. But, since it has been brought to my attention, I have made an order that you shall have every Wednesday afternoon for a holiday."

From President Peuter in person!

"And, sir," Mr. Peuter went on, struggling with something which stuck in his breast pocket, "I have—er—"—he brought it out with a violence which made him red in the face—"—here—er—a little token of appreciation, sir, from the board."

It was a blue plush case. He sprung it open dramatically, and stood with his back very much curved while he held it out to me. It was a watch so magnificent that I was at once almost as much ashamed of it as I was of the other one.

Nan had sidled up to me, and now pulled me, with the gift in my hand, out to the dining-room. There she took the other watch from my pocket, and, holding one in each lovely palm, compared them. It was all to the disadvantage of the old watch.

Then she gazed at me for a long time with huge round eyes.

"Jock, do you remember what the first telegraph message was?"

I did not. I was in no condition to remember anything. I said so.

"What hath God wrought!"

"Nan!" I chided happily.

"Well, then, for 'God' read 'love,'" said Nan, solemnly.

XXIII

THE BLUE LANDAU—THE GREEN FOOTMAN—THE BAY HORSES

LATER—it was only a few days—came a note. It was spread over two sheets of Nan's monogramed paper, in Nan's dithyrambic writing—

"Cousin Jock, dear, the lovely day—think of it!—the blue landau—the bay horses—the green footman—the count—the park—the invitation! I couldn't help it! And you've forgotten to save me! It has been four days till you come—even if you run!—and all the hours and minutes figured out for you, as usual, the moment you arrive. But think of the temptation—at such a time! Remember that I can't put him behind me as easily as you—Satan! I don't mean the count exactly, although—Jock, you ought to help more. I *can't* lock the doors on him. *You* may. And you may carry the *key!* And I'll promise to not have any duplicates made—yes, and *keep* my promise, too! Cousin Jock, dear, I know that you have no bay horses, nor blue landau, nor green footman; and that you are no count (no pun, Jock dear)—nothing but your tiny salary and your huge heart, and your (I'm *whispering*) sweetness! But you could send a boy with an invitation—it will cost only fifteen cents. And you might bring the other things I mentioned, and I would bring a lunch in a little tin box, and meet you at Wanamaker's—if you can get off—and you must—they must let you off, or I will hate them (just ask Mr. Peuter—threaten

him !); and the day will be yours after that, Cousin Jock, and mine—a little of it, please. You can have the rest. And you have things to walk with (finer than the count's !), and so have I. And Aunt Izzy is queer again, and has been listening at the portière (or must I say it was the dog ?), and I should love a walk. Don't you see that if your note should arrive before the count, I should be obliged to leave a lot of painful regrets for him ? And it would be only a *tiny* walk—not to tire you—not a long and lovely one—and we should sit on a bench out in the park, with our lunch between us, and eat—eat—eat ! And laugh ! And tell stories ! And sing little songs ! And be in the sunshine ! And smell the trees ! And see the little streams ! And drink out of the fountains ! Out of the tin cups with chains to them ! And kick our way through the tangled grass ! Oh, Jock ! I have made myself hungry, hungry, hungry ! Not for the lunch ! The other things, which we can't eat ! And if you don't come, I shall go alone ! Yes ! Without any count or Cousin Jock or anything but the tin lunch-box ! Only there won't be anybody to sit on the other side of the lunch-box ! And I hate to eat alone out of a tin box ! And if some horrid dragon comes along—why, I don't *care !* But, oh, Cousin Jock ! if the dragon should be *you !* If not, Jock dear, forgive me for being very, very lonely—and *don't* come ! "

I went.

XXIV

NAN NEVER SAW A WITCH WHO WAS FASHIONABLY DRESSED

"MADAME," I said, as we mounted a park car, "it is becoming——"

I had only her back for audience, and the conductor was grinning. That is why I stopped.

"Mister," she laughed, catching my hand as we sat down, "it was that sweet of you to notice it. Men don't. We may wear the dearest things, and they just——" She looked down at her pretty frock and flung it into artistic folds. "It is straight from Virdin. That is why it's becoming."

I looked at her happy face, and was at once happier myself.

"No," I laughed; "that is not the reason."

"Well, then, what is it?"

"It is because *you* are in it."

"Jock, you *are* sweet! Oh, we are going to have a lovely time—eating the lunch and saying—things!"

She laughed in pure roguery. Then, looking down at her pretty frock again, she asked:

"Jock, *is* it becoming? I wore it for—*you!*"

"It *is* becoming—dangerous for me," I laughed.

"Yesterday I wore it for the count."

She turned to look severely at me. Then she laughed too.

"Oh, wouldn't it be lovely to have to save *you!* To keep *you* as the apple of somebody's eye! Who would

then have to have three? I'd *wish* 'em to her! To have to remember somebody!"

She laughed, looked up, and sat a little closer.

"It's just as if we were children again! Jock, I'm going to drink out of the springs! I shall hold my nose shut!"

"I hope *not*," I said, with a fine attempt at severity.

"I *will* hold my nose shut! Sic semper tyrannis!"

My attempt had failed. I laughed.

Nan joined me.

"Jock, will you do—the—rest?"

I looked shocked.

"Don't spoil—everything! Oh, don't spoil *any*thing! Forget—some things! You—me—Cawdor—to-day. Oh, I hope the springs will smell of thyme—or sassafras—or mint!"

"You'd ruin your new frock!"

It was the weakest remonstrance I could have mustered. What did Nan ever care for a frock which had the misfortune to be in the way of her moods!

"Jock, wouldn't that be lovely! To come home all bedraggled—wrecked—like the people who have picnicked!"

"What's the matter with you to-day?" I asked.

"I'm bewitched," she whispered, leaning a little closer to do so.

"You're a witch bewitching!"

"Jock! With a broomstick, and all that? You think that a compliment, I suppose. But I never saw a witch who was at all good-looking or fashionably dressed. Maybe they do not make good pictures. I have never seen a real witch—only pictur's."

"Nan," I smiled, "if you keep on, you will make me lose——" I stopped there.

"Your head? How lovely! Oh, Jock, you're never so nice as when you've lost your head! But it has been so long—so long since you lost it! Not since the old churchyard—isn't it! Jock, lose your head, please! And, Jock, never, never find it!"

"I didn't mean anything so silly."

"Oh, your heart? Your hand? To the Somebody?

With the too many apples of her eye? Remember Somebody? Jock, I'd *hunt* for *that*—your dear old heart! And—if I found it—I'd keep it—for ever and ever—in a steel safe—for findings keepings—even in hearts!"

I tried the rôle of high propriety.

"I meant my position, Nan."

She was silent, looking down. When I saw her face it quite matched her words.

"Cousin Jock, do you mean that on *my* account——? Yes! I understand. I take you away when they need you. Forgive me. I didn't think. I am very selfish. I will try never to do it again—no matter how lonely I may be. Cousin Jock, I will *not* be lonely any more. I will *not* send for you any more. I will just *wait*—till you—come. And—if you—never—come——"

At the last word she choked a little. She swooped upon my hand. When she looked up a moment later she was smiling.

"And we will never, never forget Cawdor!" she whispered. "Not for one minute!"

"Nan," said I, "you're a delusion!"

"Why?" questioned Nan.

"You know that Peuter would——"

"He's solid for us!" Nan confessed with a laugh. "He'll let you go any time, and as much and as long as you like, because you're the nephew of your aunt! I told him a thing or two the other day! Hoch Peuter!"

"Nan!"

"And he said, 'Yes—yes, my dear young lady! Yes—yes!'"

I laughed.

"Jock, he'll say 'Yes—yes' to anything I ask, just now."

"Is it so bad as that?"

"Bad? Oh, I wish *you* could see some of the things they are not ashamed to let *me* see!"

Silence. Then:

"Jock, I was mean to you. And I hate meanness so! Oh, yes—in myself as much—as—you. Jock, I thought—at first—when you said that about the bank

—that it was just your own excuse for—not—not going with me. That I bored you! Jock—oh, Jock—it hurt—down here!" She put a hand on her heart, and I thought with shame of my promise to Aunt Izzy to appear bored. Now, would she laugh at me?

Another silence. She did not.

"Jock—it—wasn't?"

I looked down at her. I wonder what it was I looked? For, at once, Nan's face cleared.

"Jock—please—it *wasn't?*" she cooed, in her own phrase.

Well. It wasn't. I said so.

"Jock, let's *not* be second cousins to-day!"

"Well——" I began weakly.

"Not even first cousins!"

Then, while I dallied with temptation:

"Not cousins at all!"

XXV

IF PORPHORY WERE TO SHOOT HIMSELF, HE'D BE DEAD—MAYBE

AND I *did* have the rather questionable felicity of eating my luncheon on a bench in the park, while I watched furtively for any one who might chance that way. And some one did—a footman, whom we recognized as the green one belonging to the count.

Porphory presented his compliments.

"Well, what does he want?" laughed Nan.

The footman intimated discreetly that it was herself.

"Tell him I'm engaged."

Nan looked down. I flushed with joy. Then she looked up and saw me. She twisted my mother's ring about her finger.

"Or, if he wants *me*," she went on, "tell him to come after me."

I felt the flush leave my face, and that it was quite cold. The footman disappeared at once. Nan spoke to my mood.

"Jock, he's such fun!"

"What is fun to you, Nan, may be death to—some one else!"

"Jock, don't! Please don't be serious! Not cousin, you know."

"Suppose Porphory really adores you?"

"Oh!—*Porphory!*"

"And if he were to shoot himself? Sometimes they do."

"Well?"

Nan shrugged her pretty shoulders indifferently.

"Then he'd be dead—maybe."

"And you'd be in the newspapers!"

"Dear Cousin Jock!" said Nan. "First Cousin Jock! Fear not!"

Porphory came tripping through the grass, holding up his trousers as a young lady does her frock. Nan giggled.

"Here, count," she cried, before he had arrived quite or had time to object, "it is luncheon! Sit cross-legged on the grass—there—between us! Where we can look down on you."

She handed him a sandwich on the end of a stick, and made him eat it.

"It is to be al fresco, you know, and jokey."

It was. She made him drink out of the fountains, out of the tin cups with chains to them, get his shoes and cuffs wet, his hair disarranged—his moustache. For a while he made a magnificent pretence of enjoyment. Then he grew triste—then silent—then he abruptly left us, scowling.

Nan laughed. She had finished him.

"Nan," I asked, "did you bring him here just to show me?"

"Show you? What?"—in the most engaging innocency.

"Nothing," laughed I.

"You have called him the most dreadful kind of names!"

"And you haven't."

"No."

"You've thought 'em! *Done* 'em to him!"

I had surprised her. She looked up. I caught something in her eyes which quite satisfied me.

"Jock," she said, "I don't *like* you."

"Nan," I retorted, "I'm *not* dull."

"Stop! This is a time to be dull—and polite."

I looked my reproach. Nan softened.

"Don't spoil anything—to-day. I wouldn't let him. It's all too sweet, dear Jock! Not *cousin* again to-day!"

And it was not cousin again that day.

XXVI

BUT—WAS THERE AN EYE AT THE WINDOW?

THREE hours later I left her at her door.

"Jock dear," she said, "I don't care for landaus—or horses—or footmen—or counts—but only the park—and— Jock, I like to walk and eat sandwiches on a bench and drink out of the fountains and see the count—get angry. Wasn't it lovely? Jock, I did—I *did* drink out of the fountains! And spoil my frock!"

She had *my* hand now.

"Nan, do you like my hand?" I teased.

She did not do as I had done, but laughed and kept it.

"Yes! It has been like that all the day! Do you know that you have been laughing and joking and commenting funnily upon people and things? And telling the cunningest stories? Jock, your stories are lovely! And that I have scarcely said a word for the last hour? Only you, you, you! Jock, what has come over you? That's the way it was when we were children. And didn't you like that, Jock?"

"Why—God bless you, Nan, yes!" I said.

"And aren't you glad that I put that other Jock out of the door?"

I laughed her another yes.

"And won't you see that he never gets in again?"

"Yes!"

"Jock, I wasn't sure at first that you could save me."

I looked my wonder and rebuke.

"You know *you* weren't, either. You said it would be hard! Remember the coals?"

"Yes," I laughed, "I remember!"

"But, now, Jock, I am sure that you will."

"So am I."

"Jock, it *won't* be hard. And——"

She hesitated.

"Out with it!" I cried. "All that sweetness was not meant to be wasted—on me."

"No"—very seriously.

I was one step below her. She came down to me.

"Jock, would you go for another walk—more drinks—more lunch—another spoiled frock?"

I think my face must have lit up at the suggestion.

"To-morrow?" she whispered.

I shook my head.

"Because of my sandwiches? We can leave them at home."

Another shake—a little less decided, perhaps.

"Nor the next day?"

"Suppose the bank should fail?"

Again that little woe came into her face. She retreated sorrowfully up the step. That newer and deeper tone which began to speak now and then answered me. And a glorious smile came with it.

"I forgot, dear, dear old Cousin Jock! It is so easy to forget! Cousin Jock, we will go on Sunday—when there is no bank—and no work—and no fear of losing—I can wait till then—yes, without a moment of loneliness. Cousin Jock, will you take me on Sunday?"

At my "yes" she jumped the step between us with some impulse she did not follow out. She said good-bye quite seriously, and with a funny little tremor of the lips.

"Dear Cousin Jock, you are very, very good to me. I wish I could be as good to you—some—sometime. No——"

I had reached for her hands.

"There is an eye at the window curtain. I just saw it."

I looked and did not.

"Good-bye," said Nan, rushing to go within.

With the knob of the door in her hand, she said:

"Jock, shall it be Cousin Jock—and—Nan—again to-morrow? Or just—Jock—Nan?"

The door suddenly closed upon her.

And I walked away wondering what had come to pass. *Was* she making a fool of me? And *was* I doing just what Aunt Izzy wished—what I had promised? *Was* there an eye at the window? *Was* I a fool?

No! She had fancied that I was again making difficulties with that excuse about the bank! That I did not want her! That she bored me! I had hurt her! And who would have thought that our little butterfly Nan could be so easily wounded! I felt like a malefactor. It was absolutely necessary to go back and—have an——

But the windows were closed and the blinds were down—as if Nan had turned her back upon me.

Or now—as I walked slowly away again—was it possible that what I had heard, as Nan rushed into the house that way, was a little, choked sob?

I stopped—turned—went on—laughed—castigated myself.

Still— *Was* it a sob?

And—*would* it be Cousin Nan and Cousin Jock on the morrow once more? How simple and splendid were—Jock—Nan! I kept putting the two phrases together all the way home. Jock—Nan!

XXVII

IT NEVER RAINS BUT IT POURS—SALARY

I WENT the very next day to make my plea and to receive Nan's—if there were any. But on the threshold I forgot all about it, and Nan had forgotten all about it long before.

She herself answered the door. The moment I got inside she closed my mouth with her hand—a proceeding I began to like altogether too much.

"Nan," said I, severely, "you must stop that!"

"What?"

"Your hand——"

I released my mouth and looked down at the pretty thing I held.

"Oh! Why?"

"Because I like it."

She laughed and gave no further attention to the matter.

"S-sh!" she whispered hugely. "*He* is here! Old Prince Charming!"

I understood whom she meant, and nodded.

"I'm so horribly frightened when he comes! I wish you were always here—as you promised aunt you would be."

"For another reason."

"Yes—another person; not ever thinking that she would need you more herself! I must have some one to help me to share the responsibility. I just sit and tremble—as I did that day you saw me in the straight chair. That's why I was sitting so straight. They

are so horribly unconventional—almost recklessly careless of—things—that I shall be thankful if I can prevent a runaway marriage." In an intensely matronly and responsible fashion.

She pushed my head forward, and let me listen a moment, then she dragged me away.

"Stop listening at the curtain!" she joyed. "Why, Jock, you reprobate, you could learn it! Easily. I'm ashamed of you. Some day you will learn it! Only women do that! You must not! Come! *I've* been watching—at the window, this time—for you. There are important communications to be made."

She pushed me into the dining-room.

"Now! What are we to do?"

She faced me with such a helpless air of calamity that I could do nothing but repeat her last word.

"About Aunt Izzy, stupid!"

"Oh!"

"Amare et sapere vix deo conceditur—even a god can't love and be wise, don't you know, Jock dear—or *is* it Cousin Jock dear! Never mind! If I let you answer, you'll say no—— But *are* we to let her go on in her mad course of——"

Then she broke down and laughed superbly. Her laughter always brought out my own.

"Infatuation," added I.

"S-sh! We'll go in presently. We *must*. We are pater and mater familias! Hurrah! But I wanted to—consult with you first. Shall I continue to chaperon Aunt Izzy? Or shall I get some younger person to do it?"

"I rather think," smiled I, "that she would prefer you!"

"Yes! I'm—easier!" I nodded my agreement.

"Your own experience," I supplemented.

"Oh, the cunning old darling! That is it! That is why she insists!"

"Insists?"

"Exactly. She is daft to have *me* present—thinking I will rebel, as of old, and leave them alone! And then whatever happens will be my fault! Why, I never

thought of that till you told me. Didn't you tell me?"

"No," said I.

"You did—you did! Why, how horribly subtle she is—and how dull I am! I've never suspected till this moment that she was not in the deadliest earnest! Why, I suppose she—and he, too—just hates me. I guess I *could* have gone to sleep—as aunty does for me. I shall be afraid to drink any of her tea hereafter. There might be drugs in it! But, for that matter, they never ask me. They just let me severely alone! You must help me!"

"To save her?"

"She's too far gone—and she knows it! Jock, your commission to save me was a mere bagatelle to what that would be!"

"Perhaps I can do something with President Peuter?"

Nan laughed me to scorn.

"There is only one thing you could do—and you mustn't."

"What is that?"

"Disable him."

"I might ruin the bank?"

"Huh!"

"Does he love Aunt Izzy more than the bank?"

"A thousand of them?"

"Nan, that's strong language."

"It's highly exact—for the case in hand. Cousin Jock—I think it had better be that to-day—we're a dull family!"

"Nan, and not Cousin," I laughed, quod erat demonstrandum.

"Oh, they just hate me! I know it! But they think they must endure me, because of what Aunt Izzy has so strenuously taught me. Jock, she takes her medicine without a change of countenance. What do you think I said to her yesterday?"

I could not guess. If I could have done so, I would not.

"I said, quite in Aunt Izzy's way, 'Aunt Izzy, you must not do those things with his hands!' Aunt stared haughtily, and then broke down and laughed. 'All

right,' she said. 'Any other commands!' 'Yes,' I said. 'You must not think of getting married without my consent—and Jock's! We would not permit it.' Jock! she flew at me and hugged me and kissed me! And laughed and laughed!"

"Keep up your surveillance," I said.

"Yes! And my don'ts. I said to her—it was on the same day—'And it is very improper to call on him at his office!'

"'Why, it's a public institution!'

"'A bank is a business place.'

"'And it's purely business!'

"'Aunty!'

"'Yes! With Jock!'

"'Oh! That's different. If it is with Jock— Then, I suppose, I may stop once in a while—to see my Cousin Jock?' Yes, *Cousin* Jock is best for to-day.

"'Certainly *not!* You're only a young girl! I'm a widow!'"

"Cousin Jock," said Nan, "I wish *I* were a widow!

I began to find these affairs—of Aunt Izzy's and President Peuter's—interesting and jolly.

"Jock," laughed Nan, "*was* there a mistake in the cash?"

"Not a penny!"

"Oh! The dear old wretch! And—oh—isn't it on his way home?"

"Not an inch! It's very much *out* of his way."

"Oh! The ancient dear! But"—Nan laughed divinely—"he's certainly put you on the K to Z ledger and Barker on the A to K?"

"I've never heard another word about it."

"Why, Jock, he's—he's quite dreadful. Why, he's——"

Nan had exhausted her vocabulary. I helped her:

"He's a liar!"

"A liar for love! It's all right."

"And does the watch keep time?"

"With the sun!"

"And the plating stays on it?"

I laughed.

"He's a regular stunner since he has turned loose. Why, Nan, he has never smiled since I knew him—till he came here! Now he's always grinning."

"That is always the way. Dear Cousin Jock, you've got to find the right person before you can smile. Look at aunt! Why, before— Don't you remember how perfectly demoniac she used to be about the great doctor? She still tries it on. But—It is no use. She don't dust Hahnemann any more. She's too happy. That is all. She kissed me the other day—just like this."

Nan threatened me with the illustration—and stopped just short—laughing gloriously.

"How a thing like that frightens some men! I *wasn't* going to kiss you—only show you!"

"Do you know that Aunt Izzy thinks that about *you?*" I asked.

"What? Heavens! What?"

"That *you* are happy—that you kiss her—without an invitation—put your arms about her neck—and she—likes it!"

Nan put her dear head down a little. Then she said, very gently:

"Jock, I *am* happy! I never before was so happy—thank you!"

"Thank *me?*"

She looked demurely down.

"Aunt Izzy thinks that of you too—that you are happier. I told her she was *quite* mistaken—that you were horribly nasty to *me*—now and then."

"Thank *you!*" said I.

"Now and *then!*"

She stood there for quite a minute.

"Nan," said I, "that was unkind and untrue, and unlike you!"

"Unkind and untrue? Why, Jock dear, you *are* nasty to me—and you *are* less happy than— Why, how could you *help* being unhappy—saving *me?*"

But Nan's eyes said everything her lips did not.

"I am nasty to you sometimes, I am afraid," I answered, with a voice that surprised me more than Nan.

"I preach to you,—I must—to save you—I fancy,—and you are generous enough to forgive it. But I am *not* less happy."

"I wish you were *more* happy," sighed Nan, "like Aunt Izzy and me."

"Well then," I smiled, "I am!"

Nan seemed to be suddenly possessed by some wondrous thought.

"Why, then, dear Cousin Jock, we are *all* happier! You and aunt and I! And Peuter! And it's all—Whose fault *is* it?"

She looked accusingly up at *me*.

"Thank *you!*" said I.

"Not guilty!" Nan laughed happily.

She raced into the parlour. I followed her.

Mr. Peuter was there—in evening dress!

Presently he left my aunt, and came over to me.

"Mr. Merival, sir, your salary is insufficient—disgracefully insufficient! Your talents, sir, and your devotion to the bank merit a greater reward. If I had known what you were getting, sir, it would not have waited so long. But now, sir, tardy though it is, I hope you will permit me to announce to you that your salary has been increased one half—to post-date from your last month. I have asked the board, sir, to give me the necessary power to adjust these small matters, and they have very generously done so. No thanks sir, not one! You deserve it. You deserved it long ago. I shall see that you are no longer overlooked."

All quite as if it were a matter of fighting manfully for me!

Mr. Peuter returned to my aunt, with his back concaved perilously. Nan pulled me into the window.

Behind the curtain she giggled:

"And he came in evening dress to tell you!"

"I wouldn't care if he came in overalls!"

"No! Just so that you get the——"

"Money?"

Nan shook her head.

Presently, as if it were the result of much reflection, Nan asked:

"Jock, what is that about rain?"

I did not know.

"It never rains but it pours—salary—days off—me! There'll be more—salary—*more* days off—more *me!*"

XXVIII

RICHER THAN NAN—AND UGLIER

ONE day, on my way home from the bank, I met Nan.

"Jock, they will not discharge you if I happen to meet you on the street taking my own personal afternoon walk, and walk a little with you, taking your own personal walk home?"

"I should think not!" I laughed. "After three I belong to myself!"

"No—me," corrected Nan.

"Yes, pardon me, to *you*—till you're quite saved," I laughed.

"That means that you will *like* it—that you belong to me after three?"

"Yes—till you're saved."

"Then I'll walk home with you every day—poor, tired Jock—till I'm saved—or you're—lost!"

"Every day." I laughed very joyously, "till I'm lost!"

She didn't, of course. I had discounted Nan's euphemism at once. But I met her often enough to miss her when I did not.

Then came three blank days in succession. I was sure of her on the fourth. But no. Then, when I had passed the last place of a possible meeting with her, she suddenly thrust her hand into mine—from the rear.

"I wanted to see if you would miss me," she giggled.

"Did you see?"

She nodded saucily:

"The first block I was not sure. I thought of slinking home through the back streets. You walked this way—as if I were the last thing in your thoughts."

She illustrated me effectively.

"But the second block you walked this way——"

The street was quite deserted, and she again let me see how I had walked. It was with some dejection—if Nan's illustration was at all accurate.

"You looked about a little, as if I *might*—you *might*—Anyhow, I felt better, and knew I would not have to go home—through the back streets. The third block you did this——"

She relaxed her carriage despondently.

"You were so sad that I was too glad to worry you another minute. I won't have you sad."

"You do worry me," I laughed happily.

"Yes. But I amuse you, too."

"Anyhow, I am going to stop."

"Yes. Don't worry about me, Jock."

"I meant saving you."

"Jock! Why, I am not saved! Not half saved! You've talked and talked recently about that. Stop it! I won't have it! If you're going to stop, *I'm* going to backslide!"

"You are good enough now to go with Aunt Izzy to Europe next week. Then you can't backslide."

"She won't take me. And if she would, I wouldn't go. Don't trouble yourself any further. I know exactly where to send for the violinist—the mandolinist—the palmist—the poet. There is fun enough right here. I'll go to Italy—my Little Italy, aha!"

I stopped her, with a rather odious laugh. "That is not as dangerous as it was."

"I'll recall the count!"

"Too late. I have *him* thoroughly discouraged."

"You *couldn't* discourage him—if I liked!"

"He has another——"

"Who?"

"—richer—"

She faced me violently about.

"Malvina Trescott."

"And uglier!" laughed Nan: "Huh!" The last was a pretty little gesture of contempt with her right shoulder. "Shall I show you whether he'll come?"

"Nan, dear, to recall Count Porphory undoes everything we have accomplished."

The shoulder was aimed at me now.

"Huh! What do you care?"

"It is your uncle's solemn *last will and testament!* It is the wish of our aunt—it is the wish of your fiancé, Cousin Cawdor."

And what is the wish of my fiancé Cousin Jock?"

"Precisely those of my aunt and of my cousin."

"*Mine?*"—with a huge wave of joy.

"Cawdor's. Honour's. Duty's."

"Oh!"—with immense disgust.

"A little while ago the world could have easily been persuaded to say some very harsh things about your frivolities. Now——"

"What do they say now, Cousin Jock?"

"Nothing that is not very good."

"Then, Jock, why do you want me to go back to that old butterfly life again?"

"I don't want you to do that. You will not. You could not now. You know there is a better and deeper and sweeter life than that. I am sure you will not."

She suppressed some bitter emotion, and cried:

"I *will!* And stop calling me 'dear'! It maddens me! Stop, or I'll say damn!"

She stamped her foot with such savagery that an old gentleman who was passing turned so suddenly as to lose his hat. I handed it to him with an apology for Nan. He backed away cautiously. Nan did not appear to have even seen him.

"I will *never* submit to being so lonely again! It is too horrible. I never was lonely before—before I was—yes—engaged to *you!* And—and after you have taught me how to be—contented!"

"Though engaged," I supplemented, "to two!"

"Oh, it's easy enough to joke!"

"Nothing is more difficult," said I:

"To juggle with—with—yes—breaking hearts! If you don't stop, I'll say another damn! I feel that way—to-day!"

I stared.

"Breaking hearts, Nan dear?" I questioned, more seriously, I think, than I had ever addressed her. "No one shall hurt your heart."

She looked up at me, and laughed gloriously.

"'Nan dear'! Not a single 'cousin'! Say it again!"

I laughed—and did.

"Isn't that a lovely figure of speech? And, oh, how it shocked you—that and the swear word—into being kind to me! I'll use 'em again, just to skeer you!"

I turned my eyes away severely—to cough.

"Nan," I said, "there are some things too sacred to trifle with."

"Hearts?"

"Oh, Nan!"

"Hearts?"

She stamped her foot—stopped for her answer.

"Look out!" she threatened; "I'll swear!"

"Yes—then!"

"Whose?"

"Oh, no one's—in particular. Only——"

"We'll see!"

I stared an inquiry.

"Some day I'll just test a certain man's—heart!"

"Cawdor's?"

"I'll cut both my engagements—that's what you'll both do with me in the end—and take the first millionaire who wants an ornament for his enamelled fireside! Or one of my Poor Things! Oh, you think nobody really wants me! That I'm to be handed over to Cawdor because he can 'manage' me! I am certain to be disposed of in that way with the utmost ease and propriety. Well, you'll see! I'll test some one!"

I did nothing but look sadly at Nan.

"Then," she laughed, "you and Cawdor and the count and 'the others' may look on and envy me my —happiness."

"Misery."

"Happiness!"

She stamped her foot again. I said nothing. She came confidently closer, and whispered witchingly:

"Misery."

I smiled—really quite sadly, I think.

"Oh, what a tempest in a teapot! But that's just what I am—a little sizzling—boiling—cooling—scrapping teapot!"

"You might have added," I smiled, "a very pretty little teapot, out of which come very charming things."

"Yes, and some hot and horrid."

"Sometimes," I smiled.

"Jock, I'm nasty and disagreeable, I know. But I wouldn't be me if I were not. But you are not going to stop saving me—and make me backslide, just so that you can't. I know that, too. I suppose it is just because I'm so disagreeable that you don't stop—so that if I really want to keep on being saved I had better keep that up too. Jock, you want me to be just me—don't you?"

There was a brief silence. Then:

"Jock, a moment ago we were both happy. Let us forget that we quarrelled, and not say anything more to-day that is disagreeable—not even damn!"

"With all my heart," I replied.

"'With all your heart!'" Nan repeated. "What a strange thing 'all your heart' is!"

"Like any other," I said.

After a moment Nan shook her head wisely.

"No," she said, "it is like no other! It is higher, wider, deeper."

"I am sorry," said I.

"I am glad."

"Because your own is so?"

"Is it?"

"Yes."

Nan was silent for a moment. Her lovely head

drooped. She made her steps to match mine. Then she said, with enchanting softness:

"I am glad—you *know*, Jock dear."

The moment was propitious for indiscretion.

"Nan—" I began.

XXIX

COULD THE FRIVOLOUS WOMAN LOVE THE SERIOUS MAN WITH A BROKEN FACE?

WE were passing a milliner's shop. Nan pulled me—by the hand—inside. She pounced upon a hat and perched it upon her head.

"Jock, dear, I've been coveting this for several days. How do you like it? I wouldn't buy it until *you* saw it and approved of it. He is my—my fiancé," she explained to the proprietress, with a beautiful little dignity which she put on for the few words, and then immediately put off.

I liked it. I liked everything Nan put on her head, for it seemed that everything she put on it liked her.

She pulled off my own hat—which, to my horror, I discovered I had not—and perched the milliner's confection there. Then she stepped back and walked about me, viewing it.

"I do, too," she announced. "I'll take it. Jock, you look horribly funny. Here! Ad captandum!"

She showed me myself in a huge mirror, and I agreed with her.

But she had left her purse at home. After a furtive glance at my own, I offered to pay for it.

The next day she returned the money.

"But, Jock," she wrote, "if I were your *wife*—or the wife of any other poor man instead of Cawdor—I'd trim my own hats. I can do it—you know that—as well as any one this side of Paris. Why, I could help

my husband by keeping a millinery shop! Wouldn't that be great! Here's the money, Jock, dear. I wish it was more. It must have nearly taken a month out of your tiny salary! Why, Jock—it must have been pay-day, or you would *never* have had so *much* money. Oh, I know how you have to trim to keep the tailor and all the rest looking pleasant! Thank you, Jock! I wish you would suddenly become very rich! Oh, a millionaire! Not one of the kind I threatened to marry. But a nice one—like none on earth at the present time. Wouldn't it be fun seeing what you'd do with the money! I'll bet you'd give every beggar who came a penny—the impostors and all! And maybe you'd ask me to marry you! And I'd have the fun of saying, in a grotto voice, 'No! Remember Cawdor!' Oh, I wish—I wish—I wish there were some way of giving you some of *my* old money! It is too much for a woman to have—even when she becomes an archbishopress. And men can make so much better use of money than women! And wouldn't I be happy—if you were rich—rich—rich! And I poor—poor—poor! I'd borrow and borrow and borrow of you—every day several dollars! And then you wouldn't be so much wasted in that horrid little hot, stuffy office! I hate it! And we could go to the park oftener, and eat sandwiches on a bench, and spoil our frocks, and so on. I know they don't like it that I take you out so much. But I don't care! They do not understand that you are saving me. Why don't you tell them? I know that Mr. Peuter would approve at once. *He* will understand. Why aren't we saving him? And Aunt Izzy, too? Only, dear Cousin Jock (did you never think of that?), *we* are saving them *to* and *for* happiness, and not *away* and *from* it—and for some one else!

"Jock, it's very funny—but I am seeing you all day with that hat on your dear old head! Wouldn't you have been the loveliest thing on earth if you had lived when men wore such huge hats, with huge plumes on them! That rich black on your thick, yellow hair! Jock, you rascal, you're an awfully handsome chap, and I half believe you know it! And you know how to wear

your few clothes, Jock, and how to walk and stand! Did you ever think how dreadfully most people stand —just as if a push would send them to the ground. A man ought to stand as if he were a rock—a sculptured one, nailed down! (I'm laughing! Please laugh, too!) Pardon me for saying that. I'm both lonely and hungry for something to-day. I want you to find out what it is, and get it for me. I'm changing. I have less peace—more impatience. I want to swear more! I take that all back about you being such and such things. I suppose you are really modest. If you're not, you're a most accomplished pretender—that's all.

"But, Jock, I'm running all toward philosophy just now—at least I think that's it. I'm not always exact in my definitions and Cawdor's Latin. But I'm just wondering— Now, let us suppose a man handsome within and handsome without (not *you* this time)—any man. That sort is hard to suppose, but I have done it. Have you got him? Now, suppose a woman rather superficial and frivolous and sweary and don't care should love such a man. Suppose, further, that he should suddenly—perhaps in some dreadful accident —lose all his outward beauty. What *would* happen to the superficial woman? Of course, first she'd swear. But then? We are both inclined, I think, to agree that she must have loved him for his outward attributes quite alone. His personal beauty—his popularity—his tenderness—goodness—sweetness—his good manners. Do you suppose she would love him with a broken face? Or only one eye? Or a crutch? Or an ear-trumpet? And, oh, horrors! suppose, further, that he had met with his accident in some sort of a rescue of *her! That* might happen, you know. Then he would feel that she *had* to love him! And suppose she couldn't—absolutely couldn't! You know one *can't* do some things, no matter how much one may try. And, worse still, suppose he had met with his accident by rescuing her from the consequences of some silly prank of hers! Wouldn't that be *awful?* And suppose he had to give up things for her — afterward? Great huge things! Oh, not houses and lands and stocks and

bonds! *That* wouldn't cut any figure with her. Give her credit for that. But some big, big principle Something he loved! Suppose he was a Christian and she had made him be a Jew! Suppose— Well, suppose that he had dishonoured honour for her! Oh, oh, oh! Better and better! That's the biggest thing a man could do. Suppose that honour stood between them, and he *could* not dishonour it, because she would hate him if he did. Yet if he didn't, he couldn't have her. Suppose he couldn't win her—woo her—on account of some one else—say—without her hating him for it! Then, suppose that she dishonoured herself to save *him* from dishonouring honour—to *make* him take her—love her—and so that the other one *not* take her. (Don't you see that no one else *would* love her then? And that he'd *have* to? Oh, a woman—but not a man—could—would—do that! She'd give honour every day in the week for love!) Well, suppose she'd done that, and he accepted her sacrifice—by making a greater one—and her—as he'd simply *have* to do—Heavens! how I have ramified! I'm bewildered by my own logic! *Is* it logic? Where were we? I shall never find my way back! Let me see—oh! Why, then suppose *she* couldn't love him on account of the crutch—or the ear-trumpet—or the thick glasses—or the scars which *she* had caused? And suppose there were scars on his soul, too, which she had made! Where did we begin? Oh, where she *ought* to love him—and—because he was foolish—she couldn't! Then, while she might feel that she ought still to love him, she might, also, get out of it by feeling that he was a fool—for putting himself into danger for such a silly cause. No woman can love a fool, Jock. Do you think she could keep him deceived? You remember how little Carnahan was killed? He was out with a lot of our girls, and they dared him to climb the perpendicular ladder on the college water-tower. He was a timid little chap, and blushed when they dared him. He understood what it meant. He'd as soon have been dead as—*that*. Well, you remember that he started to climb, and when only about twenty feet from the ground looked down, and probably thought it a

thousand. He lost his nerve and fell. What was it we all said? That he was a fool—and we only pitied him a little.

"Jock, what a funny, funny letter! It is one of my sibyl days! But—do you think the frivolous woman could love the serious man with a broken face? I don't! Good-night."

XXX

SINCE THE DAY I KISSED HER—NIHIL

WITH NAN'S note came one from Aunt Izzy. She wrote :—

"For a while I was not sure of you. Your methods seemed strange. But I suppose I am too old-fashioned to understand you modern young men—though you are not so young any more, and are, I am happy to say, more old-fashioned than any modern young man I know. Anyhow, it is best to judge of results rather than methods. And the results are more than satisfactory, and I feel that I can now go to Europe with no anticipations of trouble either while I am there or after I return. I have not heard a violin or a mandolin since the day you kissed her. Though she mentioned quite casually the other day that she had met Glück, the palmist, and that he had taken her to Little Italy (they used to go there when he was so intimate at the house, you remember) and returned with her to the door. I happened to see them on the step—I was at the parlour window—and though Nan certainly did not see me, she very frankly told me all about it. If it hadn't been for her extreme frankness I should have been a little disturbed. But it is all right. A girl don't tell what she don't want known. Don't bother your head about it. I don't. I find, also, that she has been going to all sorts of afternoon things with *you*—lectures, concerts, the Zoo." She had done no such thing. I wondered if it might be Glück. "I trust the good work will continue during my stay in Europe. You must write to me constantly, and keep me informed

about her. I will see Cawdor at once on my arrival, and will write you fully about the dear boy and his wishes as to the nuptials. It must be soon. Do not, by word or deed, say anything to prejudice her against this marriage, as I have set my heart on it as perhaps the last thing I shall ever accomplish on this earth, which has been so good to me. Cawdor shall live in a palace and have an entourage. On the other hand, try in every way to lead her to see how very, very beautiful such a marriage must be for her. How full of peace and rest and content and joy. Marriage rightly understood is all that. For I fear, sometimes, that though Nancy is now the most obedient of girls, she has not seen the loveliness of this alliance as I do since she stopped her Latin and Greek. I trust you entirely. You must accept the within cheque, not as payment—you know you are to be my heir if Cawdor marries Nan. Her fortune will then be nearly sufficient for both of them, even if he should reach a higher place in the church than I hope for; and mine will be more than sufficient for you—so that all my dear nephews and nieces will be provided for when I am gone. It is for some little expenses you will be put to on my own account in amusing Nancy while I am away. I do not feel that you should pay these out of your own still insufficient salary. God bless you, Jock dear. I shall requite your aid in this, my dearest wish, do not fear. Cawdor shall have his archbishopric—his palace—his establishment—and Nan. You shall have all you want.

"PS. Mr. Peuter tells me that he has been thinking for a long time of taking a trip to Europe. In all his many years of service at the bank he has never taken a holiday. I told him that, in my opinion, he was quite justified in taking a long one now. He is a very pleasant person, and I could almost wish he were going over when I go. But he is not.

"I wish, my dear Jock, you could come up to-morrow afternoon and have a sip of *my* tea.

"In Mr. Peuter's present state of mind, which I am glad of for your sake, dear Jock, there is not the slightest

doubt that you will get soon a further advance in both your salary and your position: You may be sure that *you* are not neglected in our talk.

"Of course, you understand the reason for my friendliness to Mr. Peuter. You are not a dull person, and I have, therefore, not bothered you to explain what you must know."

XXXI

THE KIND OF TEA AUNT IZZY BREWED

I WAS quite willing to go and see what kind of tea Aunt Izzy brewed. Nan would be not far from the tea. Therefore, after hours, I put on a better coat and went out to the Square.

As I entered I smelled tea, and saw a bit of Nan's blue frock through the door. I stepped gaily between the curtains, intending to demand a cup of Nan. Aunt Izzy was behind the teapot. On the other side of the table was Mr. Peuter. Aunt's hair was dressed in the latest mode—a huge and splendid grey mass. There was a glittering little butterfly with iridescent wings perched in it. Her face was flushed a charming pink. A baby-blue stock was at the throat. She looked so infinitely youthful and happy that I was silent for very joy! She was not my savage aunt at all, but some dainty little figure of Watteau.

Peuter was in grey trousers—white puff—a frock-coat which swept royally below his knees—and smiles.

He too seemed young and happy. He leaped upon me and squeezed my hands till they hurt.

"How do you *do?* My *dear* Mr. Merival, how *do* you do?"

And Aunt Izzy said, with a very happy smile:

"Have some of *my* tea, Jock dear."

"It's perfect!" laughed Peuter.

My aunt filled *his* cup, and forgot mine.

"His fifth cup!" she whispered.

Peuter laughed recklessly.

"Oh, I'm an inebriate!"

"Presently," I smiled, when I could command ordinary speech and ordinary smiles; "but I must see Nan for a moment first, you know."

For Nan—out in the hall—was tugging at the hand which held the curtain back.

In the dining-room Nan plunged her face into my lapel and cried and laughed. I encouraged it all.

"Jock, isn't it the loveliest thing you *ever* saw!"

I was still not quite capable of ordinary speech.

"What—which?" I asked maudlinly.

"Aunt Izzy! Uncle Peuter! What's his other name?"

"Nehemiah."

"Oh! Shall we call him 'Miah?"

"Nehi would be more suitable!"

"Jock, you shall not say one nasty thing! It is the sweetest affair I ever heard of. I *will* have them married before they know it!"

"Don't do it without their consent."

"Consent! If he don't ask her the next time he comes—perhaps this time—he's a brute; and he isn't! Why, who could resist her? Oh, she's a dear! She said while I was dressing her——"

"You dressing her!"

Nan nodded solemnly.

"I did it! And while I was doing it she kept up the funniest—oh, the brightest—talk you ever heard! Like you!"

"Like *you!*" I insisted.

"Yes, me! All those little things of mine that you like! Only she had more and better of them. She put me to shame. Jock, the doctor was a very great man—but a very dreadful one to live with. And Aunt Izzy thinks she has been living up to him all the time! Just torturing her heart out of herself! Jock, I put up her hair. Pellini couldn't have done it better. Then I showed her herself in the mirror. She acknowledged that she looked sweet. After that she submitted to the frock. Then the baby-blue stock had to go with it. She saw that she was getting sweeter and sweeter all the time. Then I said that she was a little too pale. She

thought so, too. I tried a little rouge. Yes! Then she let me put more on! Then the butterfly! Jock, she's found her dear self! Just like me and you and every one—when the prince comes! She will never be the dear old savage any more! It is too late!"

"Not so long as she has Peuter."

"As long as she has a mirror! She kicked a little about a black patch on her chin—but only a little. I let it go for this time. She'll come to that, too. It belongs to her. I *will* have the black patch! Her chin is lovely—except the mole. And I'm going to pull the hairs out of that and put it right there! Why, Jock," Nan went on didactically, "some chins are just made for black patches! Now, mine isn't."

She let me see it.

"Is it?"

She put one she had got ready for Aunt Izzy on her own chin and repeated her question:

"Is it, Jock dear?"

"No!" I half shouted, meaning "Yes."

Nan quite understood.

"Jock, you're lovely!" she said.

"And no patch on my chin?"

In an instant she was putting hers there, saying as she worked:

"Jock, she has told me to order four!"

"What?"

"*Frocks!* She has just my figure! Think of it! Look!"

I did. She showed me.

"I shall not have hers at her age!"

"No fool like an old——" I began.

"Stop it!" Nan put some of her fingers in my mouth to make sure that I would. "I won't have it! It is *too* sacred! She is the sweetest thing that ever lived—not as slow and old and poky as you—to day! And he's younger than I am by one hundred years!"

"It's funny that aunt should object to *your* doings—any longer. And that you should *not* object to hers!"

Nan stared. I think she did not quite know whether that was for or against her.

"Jock! He came"—Nan bubbled so that she had to subside first—"to raise your *celery!*"

"What? Again?"

Nan nodded.

"And you're to be promoted. You are to be a teller. What are you to tell? Something to—*me?*"

"How do you know this?"

"And you are to have *two* afternoons off! Only think of the park—and me! Oh, he said the sweetest things about you! And a *chain* for the watch!"

"Nan," I demanded severely, "how did you find these things out?"

"I listened."

I laughed with happy hopelessness.

"And did you see her *feet?*"

"No," I said.

"Well! That is the loveliest thing about her! Her feet are delicious! And they are in my patent-leathers! Come!"

Nan pulled me through the portière, with that infernal patch upon my face, to see Aunt Izzy's feet!

XXXII

PEUTER COMES UP—I GO DOWN

PEUTER developed much too rapidly for Nan and me to keep up. There were box parties, suppers, art clubs, first nights, private views, studio teas—always somebody's Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, or Saturday—quite too much for Nan and me. But not for Aunt Izzy. Peuter ridiculed the Bas-Bleue Société—and she resigned. He told her that it was proper to attend comic opera—and she went. To wear high heels—and she wore them. There was no more of the hospitals, Zoo, and culture lectures. My own advancement went on with such bewildering rapidity that Aunt Izzy felt called upon to make some explanation.

"Jock dear, you see, I began to understand that I could help you in your business—by a little—a very little—politeness—to—to—Mr.—oh—*Peuter*. And I have, haven't I?"

"You have, aunt, God bless you!" I laughed. "I have almost no work to do but draw my salary—a big one!"

"I know, Jock, that that is not quite true. But if I am rude to him *now*, you might be reduced again. That would be *very* disagreeable, wouldn't it?"

"Very!"

"Yes. When one has been promoted, to be sent down again. Why, all your— That disagreeable Barker would *laugh* at you."

"I could not endure *that!*"

"You *shan't*, Jock."

"Not if you have to—mar—"

"Jock dear! You know I don't mind a joke. But a gentleman—*such* a gentleman as you are—knows when he is going too—far. I think it would be *very* unwise—for you—for me to discontinue Mr. Peuter's acquaintance—*now!*"

"Very, aunt, very!"

"Thank you, Jock. Kiss me—and go."

I had noticed that Aunt Izzy was in her loveliest frock, and that she developed some of the old haste in getting rid of me as the clock neared five. On the steps I met Mr. Peuter. He was coming up as I went down.

XXXIII

AND NAN OPENS THE WINDOW—AND CLOSES IT

"JOCK!"

Nan, at the window.

"I was listening. You must *not* be nasty to Aunt Izzy. I won't have it. You must help her to forget the doctor. I was *listening*."

"And remember Peuter?"

"But, Jock, isn't he the jolliest old party you ever saw? I adore him And if aunt don't take him—She'd better look out for her old Cawdor! I'd rather be a bankeress than an archbishopress—fine as that is!"

She closed the window brusquely in my face.

Then she opened it again.

"Cousin Jock, I wonder if she is *never* going to Europe?"

"Has she been putting it off?"

"She hasn't put it on yet. And Cawdor dying to see her—for some mysterious reason which does not ever worry her now."

She pulled the window downward a little, then quite up again.

"I heard her tell him that she hoped *your* advancement wouldn't stop with—something. I wasn't near enough to hear *what*. But I think her—marriage! Aunt Izzy said it very low, and with her head down. But he said no—very decidedly. And she thanked him—very decidedly. Jock, I think he won't stop until you're president."

"Then where will he be?"

" Married—which will be nicer ! Jock, wouldn't you rather be married than president ? "

Now she closed the window—and, for a moment, let me see her laughing, witching face behind it.

I stood there. I am sure my face was quite expressionless. I was, once more, thinking—thinking—thinking ! Nan slowly withdrew. Was the tenderness I saw on her face, as it grew vague in the shadows of the room, all fancy ?

When I could just make her out as eyes and lips and nostrils, with an aureole of splendid hair, she very slowly put the tips of her fingers to her lips, leaned forward, dropped what they held toward me, vanished.

But even then the tender wistfulness I had fancied remained.

I—may I tell that ?—took it away with me.

But, God knows, I left even more than I took ! That is to say, upon reflection, I left all I had ! And I wished I had had less to leave !

XXXIV

"YERE'S AN ATTRACTIVE LITTLE FILLY"

I SUPPOSE it was aunt's letter, with its naïve appeal to my somewhat neglected honour, which brought about our little quarrel—the first real one we had ever had. I endeavoured—clumsily, perhaps—to do what Aunt Izzy had asked—to lead Nan to see what, to save my life, I could never see myself—the advantages of the marriage to Cawdor. She at last was in Europe.

"I see them," Nan had laughed. "I have seen them since I was seven! You, and everybody else, have helped me!"

"But—you see them less and less now?"

"Yes, thank you," she admitted with a smile; "and you more and more. It's so strange!"

I smiled an affirmative.

This seemed to anger Nan.

"You have all agreed to sell me! Well, I'm willing. What do I care? What does any woman care? You put us up and sell us like cattle—horses! Then, when we are unhappy and kick, you blame it on us! 'Gents, yere's an attractive little filly—fourteen hands high—good stepper—fearless of steam—good style—broken to any kind of harness while a colt—grooms well—prefers single harness—but will not kick if driven double—will drive with *any* mate, though she has preferences—warranted serviceably sound and kind in every particular. Should be kindly treated, but will not resent harsh treatment—for more than a minute—gents, what's the bid?'"

It was in quite the way of a well-known auctioneer at

a horse auction where we had several times stopped to listen. I laughed.

"Yes! And you—you, Jock Merival—you, the companion of my childhood—help to do it—then laugh! I'd like to say damn, but I'm not mad enough—yet."

I laughed again. But it was not a merry laugh by any means. However, Nan made me go—go at once.

"I never want to see your face again!" she had said. "Go before I swear, and call you Cousin Jock—Second Cousin Jock! Go!"

And there was no withstanding her on that day. Was she really savage? She sailed away from me as if she were.

I waited a week, and heard nothing. Another. I was amazed. Then I was rather more amazed to find that I was planning the best way of approaching Nan without a loss of dignity. She must be saved! I summarily suppressed myself and this, and— A day or two later I went—without any plans, excuses, or dignity—only to see Nan!

And—perhaps I ought not to say it—I was glad I had gone—and Nan was! She said so! She would have sent for me the next day. And then she joyously asked whether I was not sorry I had not waited another day!

And I said no—and laughed—and kissed her hands—and laid my dignity at her feet.

"For that would have been twenty-four hours less of you!"

"And think of the minutes and seconds!"

"Yes!"

"Jock, don't ever stay away *quite* so long," sighed Nan.

"Nan, don't ever *wait* so long," laughed I.

"I *had* to send for Glück. It's your fault."

I laughed.

"And I can't bounce him—immediately—now."

I laughed.

XXXV

NAN HAD NO ENAMEL PAPER

ANOTHER day I met Glück the palmist on the steps hastening away, guiltily, I fancied, as I arrived. At once I became both suspicious and angry. It was one of the days when I was presumed to be at the bank. But this was an election day—a holiday—which Nan and Glück had quite naturally overlooked.

Entering, I hotly accused Nan of not playing fair. She acknowledged it with the frankness of innocency which always disarmed me.

I laughed. Nan followed that laugh straight to my heart.

" Jock dear, I thought you would be at the bank and never know it. And—they only come once a week! I *had* to get them back a little the week you were so nasty to me. I couldn't stand it—you know Aunt Izzy is gone—and you too—now it's hard to bounce them."

" You were to announce our engagement, and their consequent dislodgment—and you said, ' Jock dear ' ! "

I chuckled. Nan was very serious.

" Yes—I know, Jock dear, on my enamel paper. But in the first place, I *had* no enamel paper at the moment, and—you know how things run on—I didn't get any for a long time—I haven't got it yet— *Don't* strike me, Jock ! "

" Nan—Nan—Nan ! " I delighted.

"—and they kept on dropping in after I had once more asked them to drop—and—how *could* I tell the poor, poor things to—*not*—then ! They are always so hungry and— Why, Jock dear, you have no idea

how poor and friendless they are! And how poor and friendless I was that horrid week! They have nobody but me! I had nobody but them that week. And I think 'Jock dear' very nice."

"Enough!" said I. "Too much!"

"For *them*—of course," agreed Nan. "But not for you—since you are back."

I laughed and adored her.

"Well, Cousin Jock dear, I limited them to once a week—on the days you *had* to be at the bank and wouldn't know. And I made them distribute themselves a little. I really forbade them to all come at one time—as they used to—making an uproar—and leaving crumbs on the carpet for Nausicaa to sweep up. I always meant to bounce them—and didn't. But, Jock, mayn't I keep them—and you, too?"

I shook her a "No."

"Just once a week for them—the days you *can't* come—and you *all* the time you can come? Please, Jock *dear!*"

I held my advanced ground. Nan weakened. I increased my demands in diplomatic fashion.

"Nan," said I, "they will think that you have been making a fool of me. That is a decidedly unpleasant position for a man like me——"

"Ahem!" said Nan. "In a bank!"

But I defiantly repeated my words.

"—a deucedly——"

"You said 'decidedly.'"

"—a decidedly unpleasant position for a man like me——"

I waited. Nan was quite silent.

"—to occupy in the eyes of adventurers like them."

"How'll we fix it, Jock?" was Nan's surprising answer.

I gave her an ultimatum.

"You must dismiss them publicly—in—er—my presence! They must be humiliated. That is the only punishment they will understand and that will satisfy me."

Instead of contesting this with me, as I supposed

Nan would, she surprised me again by seizing the idea with immense enthusiasm.

"Yes! And announce our engagement! At last, if not at first!"

"Our—what?"

"Engagement—engagement—engagement!"

She made a funnel of her hands and poured it into my ear.

"I should think not! *Such* an engagement!"

"I will! You demanded it! And there's nothing wrong with the engagement—yet. And how can I bounce them without a reason? Anyhow, I'll *not* be engaged to *any* one—and *not* announce it! The very idea! At least to the Poor Things! Please, Cousin Jock dear? Only to the Poor Things, then—not the newspapers?"

I am afraid I laughed—and that Nan took that for yes. Anyhow, could I retreat from my ultimatum?

"Cousin Jock dear, you have made it easy for me!"

Nan picked an imaginary thread from my coat and dropped it into the fireplace.

"Because I have really brought the Poor Things up. You know those were *not* their names when they came, and they were not nearly so queer. But, for my own selfish amusement—you have *not* an idea how hard up girls get for selfish amusements of their own, Jock dear! —I invented names for them, which—which were better for me and worse for them. And whenever Glück came I'd take him to the mantel, where the little scissors hung, and trim his cuffs. He soon learned to do it himself. And I got the dramatist to wear a frock-coat morning, noon and night."

"That was cruelty to dramatists," said I.

"Yes. I really didn't know *how* cruel it was till Glück explained that a frock-coat costs so much more than another coat, that if he got that he couldn't get new trousers."

I laughed. Nan was serious.

"Fortunately, his trousers don't matter now."

"What did you do to the rest?"

"Well—everything that was nice——"

Nan stopped and broke her guard. We laughed together.

" —for me," she added. " I encouraged the poet to write poetry. Always about——"

She stopped and looked up.

" You ? "

Nan nodded.

" That was only fair. He *wasn't* a poet when I found him. Not at all ! He didn't know he was till I told him. Even then he didn't believe it till I told him that about poeta nascitur, non fit, and put it into plain English for him. Well—he said, if I were sure of it— I told him, Gnothi seauton—to please to know himself—and he wrote me some ' verses ' the very next week."

" You seem to have reversed the Latin."

" Well, Jock, I don't know. If he were self-made——"

" He'd have to blame it on himself ? "

" Why, Jock ! " chided Nan.

But she pinched my arm.

" The mandolinist used to patch his strings with white twine. I made him change to red. So much prettier. And I taught the violinist how to compose. You'd hardly think it, but he has been engaged upon a light opera ever since I knew him. I'm——"

Again the funny look upward.

" *Don't* laugh, Jock ! I'm helping him."

" May I laugh at the opera ? "

" Certainly. That's what it's for ! It's just full of the funniest things—and they all have something doing which can't very well stop——"

XXXVI

ONE OF US MUST LIE OR STEAL

"SO you see, Jock dear, that I owe them the care of a—well——"

"An alma mater!" laughed I.

"Well," doubted Nan, "*yes!* How *are* they to go out into the world now, with the twist I have given to them, and find places?"

"For tea and biscuits!" I added.

"What you really ought to allow me to do, Cousin Jock dear, is to keep them till I can change them back to what they were when I found them. Like Calypso—and—the—er—swine. It's cruel to make them like that and then turn them loose. Let me give them back their proper names—when I can remember them—and get them to stop stealing biscuits—and doing their tricks—it won't take long—and then——"

"*No!*" laughed I.

"Can't I even keep Glück? He's twisted more than any of them."

"Not even Glück!" said I.

"Jock, I'd give 'most anything to keep *him!*"

"Nan, the more you want to keep him, the more he's got to go—root and branch and leaves and buds!"

Nan had her moment of reflection. Then she said, very suddenly:

"All right! I'll bounce 'em! All of 'em! But, Jock, you won't mind if I do it gently?"

"Do it any way you like—but do it."

I tried to tell her that *this* was serious, and that they

must really go. And I asked her to promise that they should—solemnly!

Nan looked up at me with hugely rounded eyes.

"I promise," she said.

"And I trust you," I said.

"You trust me!"

Nan walked suddenly away to the window. I thought I heard a sigh.

But when I reached her she turned upon me, laughing, and dragged me out of the window. Yet there was a lovely dewiness about her eyes which puzzled me.

"I trust you!" I repeated, as we went slowly, hand in hand, back to the room.

For a moment Nan let her head droop against my shoulder. I put my hand upon it. Nay, I stooped and kissed it. Nan turned and looked up into my face. Something grew there, as she looked, which made my arms yearn for her. I knew it for the first moment of extreme danger.

"What is it?" I asked. "Have I hurt you?"

"Yes, Jock, when you ask me to promise you solemnly and tell me that you trust me—you do not trust me—you do not believe me—you hurt me!"

Her tone and her attitude more than her words reproached me infinitely.

"Nan," said I, "I would not hurt you for the world. I'm sorry."

"Sorry don't stop the hurting, my dear Cousin Jock. When you ask me to promise, you tell me that you have never believed me. When you say that you will trust me, you tell me that you never have trusted me. And, worse—that you—never—will! Well—I must deserve it—or so good and generous a fellow would not think it. Heigho! 'Oh, wad some power the giftie gie us to see oursel's as ithers see us!' *Not!* I don't want to see myself—as you see me. I'm afraid."

"Of your own image?" I laughed.

"No!" She said it forcefully. "Afraid of losing something I have in here for *you!*"

She struck her breast fiercely.

"Afraid that if I let go it will madden me—to be

misunderstood as you misunderstand me! And then I should hate you—kill you—stand over you and see you die in agony without one tremor of remorse or pity! My image! You *can't* show me my image! You haven't got it! You have never seen it! If you saw it now you would not know it! You would think it some one else! Some one better—who need not be saved! You brute! Don't you know that it is just that which destroys women—women like me! To be mistrusted! To have to promise, promise, promise! To be dogged at every step by suspicion! That is the way it has always been with me! Since I grew up. Before that—I had you. And you asked no promises. You didn't *need* to 'trust' me!"

She shook me off, and almost sprang away from me and thence back to the window.

Presently, when I could with calmness do so, I followed her.

She turned, and, with a penitent smile, held out her hand.

"You're not a brute, Jock dear. I am. You are only good and sweet to me, and I am horrid to you. Forgive me—once more!"

But I could see that the little volcano I had sent into eruption still seethed.

"Nan," said I, "I *have* unconsciously exposed my mistrust of you. But who is to blame for it?"

"I, Jock," she answered softly.

"Now *you* heap coals," I half laughed. "But does not the same thing tell you—that I would not bother my head a minute to mistrust—any other——"

It was nearly out. But Nan faced me—wonderful, unbelievable things in her face.

"Yes. Thank you, Cousin Jock—thank God!"

Then a silence—hand in hand—which I feared to break.

"Jock," said Nan, as she dropped my hand and went alone to the table over which so many of our small battles had been fought, "I suppose that the only way to—oh—to—remember, Cawdor is for one of us to be—impossible to the other. One of us must lie or steal—

or elope—or be dishonoured in some way. Then it will be easy for the other to—*hate!*"

She flung the last word out with a sudden savagery which evidenced her desire. She meant herself by the little parable. But why should she want me to hate her—I was evidently the "other"—just when I was fancying that she might love me? Just when I was sure that I loved her? Just when I needed her—when she would need me—to keep our promise in honour?

"If one of us should become disgraced, dishonoured, a great gulf would thus be fixed between Cawdor and that one!" said I, solemnly.

Nan's hand paused in the air. A singularly hard—almost vicious—expression dimmed the light of her countenance. I heard her whisper:

"My God! My God!"

Then:

"And between *you*—and the dishonoured one?"

I hungered to say that no gulf could be fixed between us which I would not bridge. As I hesitated, Nan challenged me with an almost primeval savagery:

"You would sit in judgment over her! You would condemn her!" Then, with a final thrilling note, "You would despise her—punish her—torture her—hate her—at last kill her—with your cruel judicial coldness!"

I came and stood over her.

"I should not hate her," I said.

"Not if she would lie to you? Oh, I mean in something serious! She may have done it in little things. But if she should lie to you in something big?"

"I should know that she was still—Nan!"

She did not contest her identity.

"Then, if I should do something small and sordid and mean—promise you something 'solemnly'—and—and break my promise wantonly?"

"You would not—could not do it meanly. You would do it bravely—openly—honestly—as Nan!"

"Well, then, if I should be dishonoured—bravely—openly—honestly—as Nan—but—oh, beyond hope of redemption? If all the world turned its back on me? Cawdor? Aunt Izzy?"

"I would not."

"You'd forgive me?"

"Yes."

"And let me come to you?"

"Yes."

"And keep me?"

"Yes."

"And defy the world?"

"Defy the world."

"And be exiled with me?"

"Yes."

"Or without me?"

"Without you—if it must be."

"Jock, if you loved a woman you'd be hard to shake!" She laughed a little harshly.

"I'm glad you're my—cousin! You're the only one—of your kind. Thank God! Come here! Go away!" She tugged at me, then pushed me.

Then desperately:

"I'm glad you don't love—me!"

Then, still more desperately:

"I'm glad—I—don't—love—you! I'm glad I'm to be an archbishopress."

She went to the table. I followed. She laughed at me.

XXXVII

THE CRY OF THE VALKYRIE

NAN put her small arm round my huge waist as I stood at her side. Then suddenly she pushed me away.

"Sit on the other side of the table, Jock. You're dangerous! You're a temptation to all those things—lying—meanness—dishonour—all evil! You should have said *no* wherever you said yes. But some day some woman will adore you with all her soul! Do you hear?"

Nan flung a spoon hurtling, jangling down among the teacups.

"Some woman will adore you with all her soul—just *because* you said yes where you should have said no. Because you—*you* alone—*can* say yes where every other man would say no. But, Jock, dear, dear, dear Jock, she will be a woman—oh—not the sort of woman who would *expect* you to say yes where you ought to say no—not the sort *you* look for—she will be a *sinner!* She will be a liar—yet truth itself—she will be reckless—but more cautious than you—she will be worldly and spiritual at once—she will laugh like bubbling water at her own honour—she will agonize for yours! She will stun the world with her unmaidenly daring—she will be kind and cruel—she will nurse the scars she has made! She will deceive you—and die for you!"

Nan almost leaped to her feet and stalked tigerishly back to the comforting window. There she made a sound which was like the wild neighing of a young horse going into his first battle. She flung out her arms as he

would have cut down an enemy. Then suddenly, as he would have done when wounded to death, she faced me. Her voice was high and thrilling. It woke me as the first terrible cry of the Valkyries did.

"She will be a woman like *me!*"

And with that voice in the air—that light of a warrior goddess in her face—she stood there—facing me.

I went irresistibly toward her.

"Stop!" she cried, still in the great voice. "It is not time—for you. For me it has been time since I was born. I was born free! I am free now. Always I will be free! I laugh at the fetters the world would put upon me. I am free. Damn the world!"

I shrank a little. She came a step toward me.

"Do your hear! Damn the world! I am free!"

It rang like a bugle-note in the night.

As she looked at me her voice softened wondrously. She spoke to me as women speak to the hopelessly environed.

"But you— Dear Jock! So noble in everything else—but so much a slave! So bound! So irresistibly fettered! Yearning—hungry—sometimes desperate for what you want—what only you want—what perhaps is waiting for you—inviting you—begging you to take—yet bound by a fetish you call honour! Why, don't you know that you are the only man in the world who still worships it? don't you know that no other man would refuse to take the thing he wanted, merely because some one else wanted it! But, whether it is a bunch of roses or a—soul—*you* step aside till your inferiors are served!

"A foolish little girl makes a foolish little promise—and forgets it. A foolish old man makes a foolish will to bind her to it inescapably. She will not be bound. But the fetter cramps her very soul because to every one else it *is* a fetter irrefragable! She rebels. The world in horror cries, 'Dishonour!' She would fight—but the world will not. She would run away—but she cannot outrun the world. It is ghastly—but it *is!*

"Oh, Jock, if *you* are to be saved, if you are to be free, some one else must make you so, as you have made me. *Your* hands are bound—your heart—your soul!

You can do nothing. You *will* do nothing. God grant that some one will come who can!

"Would a woman—could she—endure a man who tried to *win* her from another? To *woo* her? Who would wait till the other was disposed of? She would hate him! But if he should come like a brute—a loving brute—and take her! Ah, God! Do you suppose she would ever go away? Don't you see how it would be? Her conscience would have had nothing to do with it! Nothing she could have done would have helped it. But, all the same, she would be his! And by the highest right on earth! Conquest! But, oh—to crawl and climb toward her! Foot by foot! Inch by inch! Cautiously! Careful to offend no one!"

The other mood came back.

"Oh, sometimes I hate you! Sometimes I could kill you! Torture you! Sometimes I say to myself, Damn honour, too! I thank God that I haven't got it! It makes a fool—a victim—a laughing-stock of *you!* The dearest fool who lives. Honour! Have you never thought that it *is* not? That it is only a modern form of thought? That in the primeval man it was not? That in the man as God set him here on the earth it *was* not? That it is the invention of selfishness to profit by the weakness of others? Honour! Think a moment. Who is it that gives and takes by it? Always and for ever it is men like you—sweet men—good men—tender men—who *give*. Always it is the brutal and callous and incapable who take by honour! And, most, the incapable. He who cannot take by his own merits takes through the operation of this horrid fetish, by another's——"

Again Nan's voice fell piteously.

"The animals—the brutes—the beasts of the field—whom God made first—*best*—because most honest—*they* haven't got it. Men have found no avenue to teach it to them! God made that impossible to man."

Quite unconsciously, I repeated Nan.

"The brutes—the beasts——"

This gave her curious pause.

"But then the dilemma! Would a woman—oh, be

she as careless of honour as even I—have a man—oh, Jock, be he as sweet and good as even you—become as those who take and never give? Would *I* have *you* brutal? Less sensitive? Less sweet? Less good? Dear, dear Jock, no! Would I have you like the beasts? Would I have you anything but what you are? Dear, dear Jock, no!"

The energy which had sustained Nan through this the most dramatic tour I had ever seen, to which I should have sworn she was no more susceptible than Nausicaa, left her, and she swayed dizzily back and forth. I started again to her aid.

"I would have you," she ended brokenly, "just—Jock!"

She subsided to an inert heap on the floor. I rushed to her, and was about to assist her when she said again, with little breath to speak:

"Stop! Prove your—adoration—of—honour—by not—taking—advantage—of me—now. I'm—crazy!"

I did what she asked.

"I shall—be—better—in a minute."

Her head drooped deeply on her breast.

"In a moment I can lie—to you—again. In a—moment."

Then:

"It's so—horrid—to be two—three—four—five—six—Nans!" She laughed woefully.

"And to get you mixed up with—two—three—four—five—Poor Things! Glück! Crinodore! Chugg! Bunnie! Thank heaven—that Nan is gone!"

After a silence:

"And it *is* maddening to see one's own cousin—such such—a chump! I—if you weren't my cousin—my own flesh and blood—I wouldn't care. But"—she laughed lightly now—"I don't care anyhow!"

XXXVIII

IS IT MALARIA ? OR ANAEMIA ?

" JOCK, what is the matter ? Tell me."

" Tell me what is the matter with me ? "

" Do *you* feel—oh—*changed*—too ? Always vexed ? Impatient ? Isn't it a dreadful feeling ? Sometimes you feel as if you must go mad if you don't get it ! "

" And you don't know what it is ! " laughed I.

" Yes. *Don't* laugh about it, Jock ! It is horrid ! Oh, I rave sometimes ! I have to go off to Little Italy —or say damn ! "

I nodded appreciatively.

" Is that the reason you forgave those damns so easily ? "

I nodded again.

" Perhaps it is old age coming on ! But, no ! It has sprung up too suddenly. A little while ago I—Well, I didn't care ! Do you understand that feeling ? "

" Yes," I answered, " perfectly. Until a little while ago I—didn't care."

" Jock, we've got the same thing ! Now, is it malaria ? Or anaemia ? Or neurasthenia ? Or some brain trouble ? Perhaps it is because, since Aunt Izzy's gone, I have so much more loneliness and responsibility ! Oh, I haven't a moment's peace any more."

Nan reflected seriously for a moment, and I let her.

" It isn't your fault, Jock ; that is certain. For the moment I became engaged to you I felt—sleepy ! "

" Encore ! " cried I. " And ditto ! "

"Yes! Wasn't it lovely? But the deuce of it—why, that's almost as bad as a damn, isn't it?—the dickens of it is that it's not that way any more! I get angry whenever I think about your—our engagement."

"We could fracture it," I suggested.

"No, sir! I just go to Little Italy when I feel like that—roam, roam, roam! That is a temporary relief. I'm glad then that I'm engaged to you. Jock, some day, when you feel that way, come with me! Oh, it's really lovely. Think of there being a country right here in this city where you have never been! And where there is—peace! Some day we'll walk there—just as when we were babies!

"No!" she said suddenly. "You'd hate it! There are too many dirty children—too many dogs—too many old clothes—to many smells! It would offend you! You would not see deep, deep, deep—down into their hearts! I mustn't take you. You'd spoil the place of peace. I oughtn't to have spoken of it! Forget it!"

"Not if it is the land of peace," I said, with unwonted gentleness. "I need that, too. And if you have found it—I will go with you to it."

"Peace!" mused Nan. "Doesn't it sound sweet? Peace! All right, you shall go. But they are not your kind of people—remember that! And you are not to hate me because they are not your sort. You are not to hate me because I like them and you don't. They are not manikins or womankins—but people!"

I think it was little more than Nan's prescribed minute when she smiled up at me wanly, and gave me her hands.

I put her on her feet. She was like one who has been seen in some secret and reprehensible rôle. I understood that I was not to speak of it. She shivered a little.

"Some tea—Jock dear?"

She led me back to the table, and presently we had some tea, and presently she was smiling at me across the table, still wanly, confessing and denying together all that had just happened, with that frankness which

was at once fascinating and distracting, but which was always final.

She took up our discussion precisely where it had lapsed.

I took it up with her, piteously enough, God knows!

XXXIX

THE FLESH, THE DEVIL, THE BISCUITS

"OH, it will make the Poor Things feel *so* important! *They* think they are the world! I've taught them to."

"And they are only the flesh and the devil."

"Only the biscuits, Jock! And, oh! I have just bought a new lot of them! It's a shame. I don't like biscuits. Well—Jock, I know a way to get them all eaten! All!"

I confessed some curiosity.

"Why, Jock, the Poor Things don't know—they can't and *can't* understand. They adore me so—and I have taught them to adore themselves so—that they *can't* understand why I don't adore them—any more—when they're better worth it. Oh, here it is! This is the way to get my crackers eaten! I'll have an 'engagement tea.' I'll send them each an invitation—I'll get the enamel paper this very day. Each one will think it is one of the others. And each one will come hating all the rest, but hoping he *may* be mistaken. You know hope jumps eternally in the human bosom—or something like that—in Tennyson. They'll each beg, borrow, or steal—or even buy—some flowers. They'll send them secretly. But I'll put them all in a row on the mantel. Oh, Jock, the mischief grows and grows! That's the way with mischief—isn't it?"

"I believe it is—with yours."

"Yes," admitted Nan with disconcerting suddenness. "That is all the mischief I know—my own. I wish it wasn't. They won't speak to each other when they

arrive—or just a growl—then silence! And you and I will be at the curtain and see it all! This way."

She illustrated by pulling my head down close to hers, and arranging them as if we were peering through one small aperture.

"Then, when they are altogether—the count is disposed of—and, Jock! he has threatened to be revenged upon both of us—I'll go in and give them tea and biscuits—and jolly them a little—and then bib—bib—bounce them!"

She sputtered the last word very joyously. The lightness was real now.

"And you'll stay at the curtain and see the fun—and be good—very, very good, for if you should be bad you would be horrid!"

"And won't you be good?"

"Jock, I'll have to. Won't you be looking on?"

"And if I wasn't?"

"*I'd* be horrid. Jock, if there should not be fun enough—if it should all be slow and poky, don't you know——I'll spring you on them at the very end—just before they're bounced."

"Don't!" laughed I.

"Why not, Jock? I'm *not* ashamed of you!"

"Nor I of you, for that matter."

Nan enjoyed this more than I did—and that is saying much.

"Jock—Jock—Jock! You're *not* dull—you're not! That was lovely. But— No, I think I will not spring you."

Now I asked why. And I added:

"I suppose I'd be an anticlimax?"

"No. They might stab you. Oh, they are reckless of human life! You ought to hear them talk! Every one of them has sold his life 'dearly'—over and over!"

"Do you mean that they will hate me?"

"Yes," answered Nan seriously. "They hate anybody who does not adore me. And the fun of it is that they hate him more if he does."

I was already on the second step toward the bottom when Nan said:

" Jock, I'm sorry I said damn."

I stopped in my descent and meant to tell her that I was sorry too. That it wasn't nice, and so on. I had already begun my homily when I noticed that the door was quite closed.

XL

AFTER ALL, I LISTENED AT THE CURTAIN

SO you observe that, after all, Nan's prophecy concerning me had come true. I was at last listening at the curtain. But, then, Nan had made it come true, as you have seen, in quite Nan's fashion. And—she was close beside me—listening, too—pinching my arm—hugging it—releasing it with a fling at some prim suggestion of propriety! However, Nan never remembered such suggestions beyond their moment, and so she continued to be intimate—teasing—fascinating—adorable—so at least I hope you would have found her—there behind the curtain.

And beyond— But first a brief parenthesis:

I protest that Saint Anthony was subjected to a lesser temptation. I shall call you to witness that Nan had long been tempting me to this, which—until I knew that she did it—seemed the meanest of eavesdropping. But temptation, unless repelled by constant prayer—and I was not as constant in prayer as the temptation demanded, I fear—will batter down the casements of the stoutest conscience. So you will recollect that when Nan proposed that I listen at the curtain, to my very face though it was the first time, I was not at all shocked—as I should have been—I did not fly to my oratory—as I should have done—I thought it would be jolly!

There!

Now to the curtain:

Nausicaa had just announced Mr. Albrecht Featherstone Glück.

"It means luck," whispered Nan. "And he hasn't had much lately—honest, Jock. I pity him—and pity's akin to—something nice. I knew he'd come first. You see, he adores me most."

Glück went to the mantel and inspected his yellow chrysanthemums. He turned the card—one of the florist's, with his name on the back—outward, gazed in some disdain and surprise at those lesser ones flanking it to the left and right, touched his own bunch into symmetry, sighed, looked carefully into the glass, took a pair of scissors hanging by a ribbon to the corner of the mantel, and carefully trimmed his cuffs.

"I keep them there for him!" giggled Nan into my ear.

Then he dampened his finger at his lips, and ran it along the edge.

Nan pinched me.

Glück went to the little table set for tea and took a biscuit from the jar. It seemed good. He took another —then a lot of them.

The bell rang. Glück retreated with his plunder into the bay-window, and looked indifferently into the Square.

"Mr. J. Percy Crowninshield," whispered the maid.

"The violinist," added Nan.

He also looked at his flowers, put his card face outward, and disposed them somewhat differently from what Nan had done.

"That's better," whispered Nan. "There were two faded ones. He has put them behind. I suppose I had them right in front."

He, too, viewed himself in the mirror, pulled down his cuffs, moved towards the table—then, with a start, saw Glück, and went—hungry, no doubt—to inspecting a "Narcissus," making believe that he had not seen Glück and that he was quite innocuous.

"Mr. Fillimore P. Chugg"—Nausicaa.

"The mandolinist"—Nan.

And he had brought his instrument. He superiorly

ignored his two contemporaries, and, taking the mandolin from its green bag, ran his thumb over the strings.

"There is only one string patched now," whispered Nan.

I observed that one of the strings was mended below the bridge with a piece of such red twine as apothecaries use.

Chugg took an airy turn up and down the room.

"Like a monarch of all he surveys"—from Nan, into my ear.

Then he had his little season at the glass and the flowers, and took the other window as the bell rang.

The poet and the dramatist arrived together—Mr. Bunnie and Mr. Crinodore. They were discussing, in the high and mighty tones which mark a barely kept truce, the state of the weather. They furtively watched their opportunity at the flowers and the mirror—and each had his.

The poet undertook to be friendly.

"Hello, Glück! That you out there?" he said quite gaily.

Glück responded as if his mouth were not quite empty

"Got a cold?"

"Yes."

"Hah! So've I. Crinodore was just saying——"

Bunnie had reached the cracker-jar.

"Now we will never know what Crinodore was saying!" said Nan.

"What was I saying?" said the dramatist, joining Bunnie at the table.

"He'll button up his coat before I come," warned Nan.

"Who?" I questioned thoughtlessly.

"Crinodore."

"Because he's a dramatist!"

"No," whispered Nan, "because of his trousers. *Don't* you remember?"

"Good heavens! Yes!"

I remembered.

"Can't you *see?*"

I peered:

"At the knees."

I saw and laughed.

"Horrid!" whispered Nan.

"Looks as if he worked on 'em."

"Jock! He might pray on them!"

"P-r-e-y, prey," spelled I.

"The poet has his buttoned," said Nan.

"Looks as if he slept in it—buttoned," said I.

"Yes. He *never* has it open. But for quite a different reason."

"Well—keep nothing from me," laughed I.

"Jock, it's more important than you think!"

I laughed out my beseeching, and Nan, surging up to me, made her disclosure.

"The palmist says that it's because he has no waistcoat."

I laughed.

"I don't believe it," said Nan.

"I do," said I.

"Now, I'd better go in—don't you think?"

I did, and Nan plunged through the curtain with a breathlessness which could only have come from a rush down the stairs.

"Boys," she cried, to my utter horror, "I am sorry! Were you waiting long?"

They hastened from their various intrenchments, Glück hiding something, Crinodore hurriedly buttoning his coat.

Nan passed herself around, giving a hand on each side.

"It was my hair, boys. I couldn't get it up. I am nervous to-day. Is it all right?"

She exhibited herself to them—back and front. They inspected her in a way to madden me, and chorussed her in an avalanche of compliment.

"Yes. Thank you, boys. And my skirt *would* go on crooked—and no other way. *Is* it respectable?"

She trailed up and down before them.

"Now line up and have some tea. Oh! I forgot to fill the jar. Here, Glück—you know where the biscuits are. Fill up while I pour the tea."

Glück looked startled for a moment, then, recovering, went to the closet and did as he was told:

Even when he came with the biscuits and filled the jar, he looked at his hostess furtively, as if her words might have had a personal hint.

I was not certain that they had not. I laughed quite as if they had. He *did* know where the biscuits were. And he should have been filled up.

But soon I laughed no more. I did not like this Nan.

I think she forgot about me presently. She had them all going—the poet reciting, the dramatist outlining the fourth act, the mandolinist accompanying the violinist, the palmist, whom she seemed to like best, holding her hand. And she was going the pace with them all!

Hang it! *Was* this the Nan who had dropped, exhausted by her emotion? The same who had thrilled me with words which had come hotly—in almost heroic stanzas—from an overloaded heart? *This* Nan, for the moment, was almost maddeningly common and slang-laden! *This* Nan was the most proper that could have been made for *this* society. But, good God! What was I saying of her in saying that!

I coughed. Everything stopped. Nan pulled up, and addressed the Poor Things:

"Now, boys, you must go. And you mustn't come any more. We've had the loveliest times together! But it's time to get married and be—goo-ood! Bunnie, boy, I wish you the whole side of the Hall of Fame. Glück, plenty of palms to read—prettier ones—and a better place to get your tea—and—and——"

She laughed a little.

"—crackers. Crinodore, don't let any one else write our plays. And Percy and Chugg, see that you write our songs, then we don't need to care who makes our laws, as Tennyson says. Better hunt up your old names——I don't recall them just now—and your own habits. Both are better—though not so funny—as mine. And they won't please any other girl as they have pleased me. For the past, thanks, dear old boys, and the hap-

piest of memories. None of us will ever forget it. I hope that none of us will be the worse for it. I shall not. I hope some of us will be the better for it—free and easy as it has been. I shall. But—for the future! Get married, boys, as I am about to do, and live happy ever after! Dear boys, forever and forever farewell!"

The five looked about at each other. Then Bunnie spoke up dizzily:

"But—which one of us is it?"

"Oh, oh, oh!" shrieked Nan, "I forgot that! And it's the chose de résistance! Poor things! It isn't any of—*you*. It is——"

She plunged upon me and dragged me before my rivals.

"Oh!" said Bunnie weakly.

"Him!" cried the palmist, as if it were beyond belief.

"I never saw him before!" said Crinodore to Glück, putting a finger between the two lower buttons of his coat.

"I'll be damned!" whispered Glück.

"What's his name?" asked Chugg of any one, also in tense whispers.

No one knew.

"Merival," whispered Nan, "the same as mine."

"Is he a relative?" asked Crowninshield, behind my back.

"My cousin," confessed Nan in a huge whisper, hanging in my arm as engaged couples are said to do.

"Her cousin!"

They all said that. As if it were highly criminal to be Nan's cousin!

The sour palmist was remembering me.

"He has a bank!"

The other four turned savagely upon him.

"Yes, sir! I had cheque cashed at his bank once!"

"My God—it's money!" said some one. "She's marrying for money!"

Then came an awkward moment. Bunnie whispered something, and they came and congratulated me—pleasantly—all but the disgruntled palmist.

"No, sir!" he said to Bunnie. "He listened at the curtain! God knows what he's seen and heard! Damn a man who listens at the curtain!"

He stalked out first.

XLI

THINK HOW FEW THERE ARE WHO ARE FUNNY AND HAVE FUNNY NAMES!

AFTER they had gone Nan waited a moment, and then, plunging upon me, laughed and cried.

"Oh, Jock," she begged, "I want them back!"

"They wouldn't come back now," I said.

"They *would!* Oh, you don't know them! I *will* have them back! My Poor Things! Oh, it was like a cage full of beautiful trained performing animals! If you only knew what a time I had to gather them together, one at a time! And now they are scattered to the four winds of heaven! I wouldn't accept *one* who hadn't a funny name, or wouldn't adopt one—and who didn't do funny things—or learn them. Think how few there are who have both! Crinodore's name *was* funny at one end, but not at the other. So I got together and made one for him. And Glück's name didn't have Featherstone in it—not Glück, either. How proud he was of it! And now they are gone for ever—and, even if I should find some other poor things, I'd have to go through all that again! Can't I have Glück back?"

"I'll try and make up for the lot of them," I laughed.

"You! You *can't.* Oh, you don't know what a huge, huge contract that will be! [For poky old you!"

She must have decided in the next instant that I could:

"Oh, *will* you, Jock *dear?*"

"I'll try to be all the beautiful animals at once!"

"Oh, *will* you! I shall expect it—demand it, Jock! Remember!"

"Cawdor?"

"Oh—Cawdor!" she disdained.

"You called me 'Jock *dear*'!"

Nan smiled divinely.

"But you called them 'dear boys'!"

Nan sighed in defeat.

"That was why I went on so just now—that you might forget that and never think of it again. You said I might bounce them kindly."

"Well," I said, "since they're gone, all is forgiven. But it was rather shocking. Has it always been as intimate—as—terrible—as that?"

"Jock, you might as well say it," sighed Nan. "You mean has it always been as common and vulgar as that? Yes—I'm sorry."

I smiled—a trifle sadly, I think—that my dainty Nan could be that. Perhaps she apprehended me. She said—

"I told you I needed to be saved!"

I said nothing. Nan came up and clung to my shoulders, looking up into my face bewitchingly.

"And you've done it! I'm glad they're gone. I couldn't endure their vulgarity now. You've made it all impossible. Could you like me if I were like that—like that really?"

"No," said I.

"You'd hate me, wouldn't you?"

"No."

"You'd think me simply—no good!"

"Something like that," I laughed.

"And you wouldn't bother about me?"

"No."

"When I want you not to bother about me," mused Nan, "I'll get the Poor Things to come back. Don't you see how easy a way that would be out of it?"

"Out of what?"

"Oh, that was just inside!" laughed Nan. "I

was thinking that if a man like you should *love* a creature with low tastes—of course he mustn't—it would be horrid—she'd make him so unhappy with her canaille ways and manners—and her low way of looking at things—against his high and noble way—and his immaculate personality——Well, if such a man should deceive himself into falling in love with such a girl —why, all she would have to do would be to introduce him into her dirty—smelly—vulgar—sordid world—and he'd stop——and wouldn't be hurt——"

She stopped there, and seemed to reflect very seriously.

"But what about the girl?" I asked. "Suppose she should be hurt? And left in her sordid world—hurt?"

"I was just thinking about that," said Nan. "And after she knew better?"

Presently she answered me.

"Jock, I don't think it would matter about *her*. He would be saved without a hurt. She would not be worth saving. And—if the hurt killed her—— Why, she might be—glad!"

"What a curious mood for my dear Nan!" said I.

"Once I knew such a girl, Jock dear," said she.

"And did she die?"

"Not yet. She hasn't taken him to her world yet."

XLII

NAN WENT OUT TO BACKSLIDE THAT DAY

NAUSICAA answered my ring.

Here I should explain, perhaps, that Nausicaa was not her name, but another of Nan's singular inventions. The maid's name was Ellen.

Nausicaa said that Nan was not in. She added that she was at the sibyl's.

"The *what?*" I exploded.

"The astrologer's," said the maid, as if that made it both plainer and less heinous. "She's been crying. I heard her say as you had forgot something. Something about saving."

"I've been sick!" I thundered. "Quarantined!"

"It's been over two weeks. I heard her say that when she cried. She didn't want to send for the Poor Things, but she just *had* to. She'd 'a' died. But they didn't come, either, and she's gone to backslide all alone."

The maid laughed.

"You ought to come and see them when they get back. My, but won't they look hungry and wore out!"

I had tried my best to interrupt Nausicaa, but she would not be interrupted.

"She's going to gether 'em all together again."

"Stop!" I shouted. The maid did—in terror. I knew just how much of this had been told to Nausicaa, with the hope of its repetition—perhaps to *me*!

"Where is the fortune-teller?"

"Which one?"

"Good God!" I cried, "are there more?"

"Oh, yessir! She didn't know which one she would pa-tron-ize to-day. She said she was only going to backslide—a little."

"Stop it!" I cried, "and give me the addresses of all the fortune-tellers you know!"

"Oh, sir!"

"Oh, hang you! those your mistress knows."

"I only knows *three* she knows."

"Let me have them—quickly."

I put them down. Meanwhile she chattered.

"They tells you funny things!"

"Yes!" I gloated. "I am glad that *you* have the wit to see their humour."

"I don't believe the half they say. They told me that I would never get married. But I got three beaux! One of them's a dandy. *He'd* surprise you, if you knowed!"

I looked up at her magnificent freckles. Nan had chosen her for these.

"That's hard to believe," I said.

She found great joy in this.

"Don't you never go, sir?"

"No."

"Not when you're in trouble?"

"No!"

The maid pitied me.

"And you've never known when you were going to be married—nor the colour of his hair and eyes—nor about the light or dark man—nor——" She was exhausted. "Oh, my! She told me about my dandy beau! She told me he's a poet. And he is! And you knows him!"

Nausicaa joyously slammed the door in my face.

Perhaps, after all, the maid's faith had infected me. I took the third address instead of the first she had given me. "Mertine, the Sibyl." It was Marriott Street—the veriest slums—Pettengill's Court—number six—four flights.

Nan was there—on one side of a dirty tabourette, the sibyl on the other. They did not look up. There was no other room apparent. I was evidently taken for an ordinary "customer."

"—and he will, at last, be won to the sweetness," the sibyl was saying, "not by the anger—the damn. He will not himself dishonour—no! But you! What is it that you are a little dishonour if you git the love? That is it. And it *will* arrive—yea—it will arrive through the dark man. No matter—no, no, no! Oh, yes. I see him plain. He hate you. He stand and scowl upon you and upon the light man. Kill you he would! But fear not, daughter of the angels; through him will your dishonour be perfected, and through dishonour his love—the love of the light one."

I coughed. The sibyl looked up and blinked.

"Go on! Go on!" urged Nan. "It's my turn."

"So, go to the dishonour which is the yellow light. He will love you for it. Is it not for him?

"Now I see very plain—the dark one. Something he wears on his head. It is like a crown. But perhaps I see not so well. And the other he has a scar. Perhap it is on his heart. Perhap on his face—But he will take you then—he will take you after the scar."

"How will the scar come? Who will make it?" asked Nan.

I was about to cough again, but I waited for the answer. I had begun to fancy that Nan had been consulting the sibyl about *me!* Well,—the consultation of astrologers—about me—did not seem so heinous.

The sibyl turned up the whites of her eyes a moment.

"I do not know surely. I see *you* at the scar."

"And is it on his heart?"

"That I cannot tell. Only that I see him suffer."

"Where? How—does he suffer?"

"It is on a bed. Nurses are there, and doctors—"

Perhaps she had exhausted Nan, and was anxious for a new victim.

"But is it his *heart?* Answer me!"

" —that is all I see this day."

" It is *not* all ! You've *got* to see more ! You've got to see whether *I* made the scar—and you haven't even told me that it is the light man who is hurt. Does he stand like this ? "

Nan gave her a very fair imitation of my way of standing.

" And does he throw his head back—like this ? "

Evidently my head !

" Shoulders up ! Chest forward ! Half smile ! As if he didn't care a hang for anybody ! Big—*good*-looking ! Now, then, *is* the man with the scar like that ? And do you see *me* hurting him ? "

She answered curtly—

" I see only the scar. Yes—it is on the heart. But also on the face. There is blood. Many people stand there. I hear a noise. It is the light man. Yes, he stands so. But you are not there—only the yellow light."

" Nan ! "

She flew about, gasped, caught her breast, laughed, and, with but an instant of embarrassment, dragged me to the place she had occupied, and, plunging me upon my knees, held her hand on my mouth.

" She was telling about Glück, Jock. Jock, how long have you been here ? "

" Ten minutes."

" Oh, oh, oh ! Then you heard all—about the count ? He is the light man she sees with something on his head. A coronet, I suppose."

I gibed through her fingers.

" A hat ! "

" Go on," said Nan to the sibyl, " and make it horrid ! I hate him ! "

The sibyl had already gone into a trance.

" I see the scar again. And the daughter of the angels is now there. And the dark man with the thing on his head. And there is a hearse—which is of trouble. And there is again the yellow light, which is of dishonour. And the light shines on the daughter of the angels—*alone*."

I laughed so abandonedly that the fortune-teller opened her eyes in reproach.

"You know, Nan, everybody is likely to be in a hospital some time or other, or be sick some time or other, and have trouble some time or other, and see hearses, and yellow lights, and even have scars!"

"Jock, you're perfectly horrid. And you, too!" She turned savagely upon the sybil. "You know very well that the light man is Mr. Glück. Next time I'll go to Professor Llewellyn, the Syriac seer. He'll tell me——"

"Precisely what you want to know?"

"Jock, I hate you!" repeated Nan. "I never really hated you till to-day. Sneaking upon me! You! All right! It will make my own meanness, when it comes to light, a little less fearful. I want you to remember then that *you* sneaked!"

Still I laughed, and knew that Nan had been questioning the stars about *me!* And still, the commerce of Nan with fortune-tellers seemed less and less deadly.

"Go on, sibyl!" I laughed myself.

"Jock, what *is* the matter with you?"

Nan knelt beside me, and half put her arm about me.

"I was skeered! I thought you'd never speak to me if you should find me here. And asking about Glück! Oh, I kept all *this* secret from you! But here you come and get right into the game!"

"I'm happy, Nan," I laughed. "Why didn't you bring me with you?"

"Then I couldn't have asked the questions I wanted to."

"Why?"

"Oh, you don't like Glück, you know."

I laughed till the sibyl blinked in fear.

"Jock, I'm happy, too!" whispered Nan.

"Nausicaa said you weren't!"

"No!"

She laughed.

"She said you were going to backslide to-day!"

"I'll discharge her!"

"Discharge her?"

"For telling the truth. But, Jock, you can save her!"

I turned my head in inquiry.

"By backsliding with me—for one day only, don't you know!"

"Done!" said I.

"Hurry, then! Go on!" to the astrologist. To me: "Jock, *do* you believe in astrology?"

"Yes—on the days when I backslide—with—you—and when you are concerned mightily about—Glück."

"Jock, I'm afraid of you! Go *on!*"

To the sibyl again, who had got her wits together.

"I must get you out of this to a safer place."

But it was very dark in the room of the astrologist, and Nan, perhaps unconsciously, came very close—and closer and closer all the time we remained.

"I wish Glück would come!" she whispered, laughing.

"So do I!"—another whisper and another happy laugh.

"Now is come into my vision a young man wearing a coat which buttons all the way up," the sibyl was proceeding. "And the light of a trouble shines on *him*. But it is not much. He is a holy man. He takes refuge in prayer. Now, as I behold, the baleful light vanishes. The man with the scar has the hand of the daughter of the angels. A priest comes—not he of only the holy manner. A priest with a beard. There is a sound of music. Perhap the wedding march. It goes so——"

She croaked forth the march from "Lohengrin."

"Is it not of the wedding?"

She addressed me.

"No," said I.

The astrologist seemed pained.

"Jock," cried Nan, half laughing, "you're horrid! Come away!"

"Yes. But first tell her that all you have told her about Glück," I joyed subtly, "is I."

"I never told her a thing!"

And she appealed to the woman.

"Did I ever tell you a thing?"

"Noth-ing!" announced the oracle.

"Except—just——"

"Just a little about Cawdor—a little about Aunt Izzy—a little about the count—the Poor Things—Glück—Glück—Glück!"

"I never mentioned their names—Mister Jock Merival—nor any one's—bib—bib—but my own!"

"Nan, I'm ashamed of you—and Glück!"

"Jock Merival, I hate you!"

"Madame," said I.

The sibyl woke up.

"May I venture a prediction? I, too, can see into the future."

She was blinking upon my humour in bewilderment. I suppose I was the first sceptic she had ever faced.

"The health officers will visit you soon."

She smiled in a sickly fashion, and said—

"Signore, I only know the English well when I am entranced. I do not, therefore, understand you at now."

I gathered Nan up and pushed her, wrangling, unwilling, out.

"Jock, you haven't paid!"

Nan did this—and I let her.

"It was worth paying for—so it was! And I hate you!"

I sent the sibyl a Parthian arrow.

"Madame," said I, "wash your hands!"

Nan pushed me out—but clung to me.

"Jock, you're horrid—to my friends. Now do you know what will happen?"

Nan was ominous.

"No," I defied, "and I don't care!"

I supposed Nan would speak, but she did not.

"What? *What* will happen?" I demanded. "I want to know. I *will*——"

Nan laughed.

"She'll wash 'em!"

XLIII

WHAT A LEVATRICE IS—AND WHO IS THE PRINCE?

NAN was never happier! And do you imagine that I was not? Even though it meant only abnegation, I was happy to know that it was me Nan had inquired about at the astrologist's—for that meant that Nan loved me! And even if I had to give her up to Cawdor—it was too sweet in this first surety to be sorry for even that! Don't you know that it is sweeter—easier—almost sacramental—to give up the Nan one loves who loves us, than to give up the Nan one loves who loves us not?

So I laughed, too.

And we raced down the rickety steps hand in hand—I first to land, Nan to leap into my arms from the third step.

Below, waiting for her, were a dozen tousled children—a bunch attacking each side—struggling for her hands. I pushed them away. Nan chided me with a sudden sharpness. But then she said at once—

"Dear, dear cousin Jock! But you mustn't hurt my babies! Wait! I know how to fix 'em! Then, since you are here, dear, old, poky Jock, and have caught me red-handed, we'll do Italy in thirty minutes. It will be better than confessing it—to show it all to you. And I've *got* to do one or the other. And you remember what you said about the girl with low tastes?"

"I remember," I laughed, "that you beguiled me into saying what I didn't mean!"

"Well, then, Jock, my dear cousin, say what you mean now. It is free here. This is another country!"

"I say now that if the foolishly exalted man adored the foolishly low girl, he would not only live—love—die and be buried in her country—even though it were this—but be glad—if she were—Nan!"

"Yes," confessed Nan. "But if he don't know it—why, it isn't. And he *don't* know!"

I heard some one say to Nan—

"Has the prince a-come? Is this the he, he, he?"

Nan put her hand on the mouth which spoke.

It was a hideous old woman, with a shawl over her head. But she flung her arms about Nan and kissed her on both cheeks. Nan kissed the woman. I dodged in and separated them.

"Jock!" laughed Nan. "She's one of the best friends I have on earth!"

Nan, laughing, looked after the retreating woman.

"She is important down here! And you've frightened her horribly. Her name is Libera Rossa Sirocco!"

I asked—

"What does she do that makes her important? I thought she was going to stab you."

"Jock," laughed Nan, "you're horrible! She's—she's—very important."

"Well—*what?*"

"A levatrice."

I insisted upon the English.

"Well—then—a midwife!"

We fronted at that moment a florid yellow sign—

PANA ITALIANO
PER
SPEZZIO LARGO

Nan dodged into the bake-shop. A bell fastened to the door tinkled. A ruddy little man pushed his head, frowning, out of a room behind a counter piled with cages. When the head saw Nan, its cap came off and a smile replaced the frown.

"Here! Fill my babies with cake!"

Nan gave him some money. Then, to the children—

"Children, your mother's got company to-day A great foreigner who don't like you. Go away. Or, if you stay, you must all go home—and wash—and put on clean pinafores——"

One of them braved even this fate.

"Where is the signore who will like us—who will come?" asked she. "And you like him very much?"

"S-s-sh!" whispered Nan. "If I hear another word, you must all *wash!* — put on clean pinafores!"

"Behind you he is!" laughed the baker to the children.

They turned to look at me again.

"Pinafores! Clean faces!" threatened Nan.

And we escaped.

She caught my arm and swung along for several minutes. Then she said, in Nan's perilous softness—

"Jock, you didn't mean me to be nasty to my babies? Glück never is."

"No," I said.

"I hated to threaten them with pinafores and clean faces. It was your fault. Oh, isn't it glorious to be free! To know that you needn't wash your face nor put on a clean pinafore! That's why I like them—because they are *never* quite clean. But, Jock, I'll bet their little souls are cleaner than ours!"

"Not cleaner than yours, Nan."

Nan reflected a moment. Then she said—

"Jock, do you think the milk-balls will make up for being so nasty to my babies?"

"Yes," I laughed. "What are they?"

"Jock, *I'm* the girl I spoke of the other day—said I knew, don't you know—and you asked whether she was dead?"

"Good-morning," said Nan to a gentleman in short red side-whiskers and a pink shirt, who stood in his own door. Over his head was a green-and-yellow sign—

ALBERGO E TRATTORIA ITALIANO

"Jock," explained Nan mysteriously, "that means eating- and sleeping-place."

The pink-shirted man grinned and took off his hat.

"Will-a you eat-a with me? You and the he?"

"No, thank you," said Nan, as if he kept the Waldorf; "not to-day."

Then to me—

"Jock, some day, when we're not travelling so fast—for now, since you are getting acquainted with my people, you'll want to come often—we'll go in and see what he has to eat."

"Thank you. I can fancy. I'd rather."

Nan gave another cordial good-morning, and I looked up to be affronted by a green moon painted upon a window.

"Jock, isn't he a beauty!"

A thin young man with oiled, curled air and a comb behind his ear was bowing, with a hand on his heart.

"Signore Martinos!" whispered Nan. "He is probably the greatest man in all Italy Minor. That's his tonsorielle. Its right name is Il Tonsorielle del' Moon That Is Green. Don't you just love it!"

"And what makes him great, pray?" I laughed.

"Glück."

I stared.

"He gets shaved there. But—oh—— There is one greater. They are all waiting for and expecting him. I am to bring him some day."

After we had passed I heard the barber say to some one who followed us closely—

"Certainly. Now we shall see! I am glad! They will be married before the snow comes."

The questioner questioned him again.

"Pish!" answered the mighty barber. "I say pish! I say it is he! It is sufficient."

XLIV

SIGNORE RAFFAELLE

"HURRY—hurry—Jock! Oh, *this* will be lovely! You will adore Signore Raffaelle! Time is flying."

I saw a white coffin displayed in the window as Nan dragged me, now nearly bereft of volition, into the little shop.

A tall old man, wearing a tall old hat, met Nan with both arms affectionately outstretched. I observed that he did not remove his hat, and he noticed that I had done so.

"That is account of my head is bal'," he explained, "and ketch col' at graves. Behol'!"

He lifted the hat sufficiently to demonstrate the truth of this; then, with a very profound bow, replaced it.

"That is most strange! It is the hat which cause the bal'. Yet cannot it undo the same. Yet cannot th'ow away hat and say, 'Be dam'! Ketch col'!'"

I bowed. He turned to Nan, once more holding out his hands. Nan took them. And I thought I saw a little mist come into her dear eyes, which made me ashamed of my once superior attitude toward these humble friends of hers. *Was* it altogether horrid to have such affection as I saw in this handsome old man's eyes for my Nan? An adoration so innocent—so childlike—that one somehow thought even of such things as the Madonne which were everywhere dis-

played in his dismal shop. Why, *he* trusted—believed—adored her! And he, with his worldly wisdom, learned in a school better than mine, would know whether Nan was worthy of trust and belief and adoration—better than I.

"Ah, daughter of the angels!" turning his head a little aside to me, but retaining her hands in his. "How she all time joll' us! How she come ev' day and joll' *me*—joll' those rascal Paythagoras. Aha! I do not think his name it *is* Paythagoras. Only that *he* was a great man. He stole the name. That is lie. Yet I dounno. This I know—he is *not* Roman, *not* Italiano! Virgin! No! No! Perhaps he is Greek. But he will not tell. Just he sit on his place and marry, marry, marry! Marry. Be dam'! Twent'-fi' cent! That is his business, signore, just as mine is that I bury. Well—they born. That is Libera Rossa Sirocco. They marry. That is razcal Signore Paythagoras—sometime good marry—more sometime bad. They die! That is *me*—and best account last—is no more! Everybody *got* to die. Not everybody got to be born—be marry. Aha! Signore, she joll' him like unto me. Oh, the daughter of the angels respect not priest! *Such* priest—be dam'! Perhaps in the church. In vestments—and holy—very—yes!"

He laughed, and touched Nan's cheek softly.

"She tell him he shall marry her—soon she bring her prince! And she will give him dol' thirt' cent—aha, ha, ha! Virgin! How that razcal Signore Paythagoras strive—wait—pray for those dol' thirt' cent!"

He brought Nan and me closer together.

"Ah, she joll' you, too?"

"Yes," I laughed, "more than you or Paythagoras!"

He laughed immensely at this, showing, for the first time, four teeth.

"But—yes—you do not know how she joll' me!"

"But you don't hate me?" said Nan.

He laughed and again put his gnarled fingers into her hair. To me, rather than to Nan, he said—

"I like it. Signore, I have had a sorrow. She come and I tell her. She say, then, the comforting things. She joll'! That also is comfort."

For a brief moment profound sadness swept the joy from his face. Then, with a sigh and a smile, he brought it back.

"Virgin! I like it! So, she say—signore—thus. That she will die if the prince do not arrive on white horse and elope her away. And that he is just behine the corner! And always peeping out at her! Aha, ha, ha! But he is 'fraid! He is prince—yes—but his clothes tore—and he have no horse—and poor—and he got to walk. Well—she say *she* will also walk. If he will hold her hand—like I. But if he do not soon come from behine those corner she die! She cannot stand them no longer. And he think she is for some one else. Ah, bah! I too git angery at those. Who is for some one else? She is for him who can win her. Aha! Why does he not come from behine the corner! Virgin! Anyhow, she will die. Yea, she will come *here* to die. And I shall bury her! Aha, ha, ha! Then I say, daughter of the angels, it shall be in black! No pink with that hair—no! Black! And her garments shall be white! And there shall be in her hair a rose of white. Here!"

He seized one from a bouquet at hand and placed it where he would have it.

"And her hands shall be thus."

He disposed them as he would have them:

"Now! Step here, signore, where the light is co'rect, and behol'!"

I did so.

"It will be," the undertaker, moved to triumph, by my own emotion, was saying, "as if I buried a jewel!"

"Yes," said I.

"Signore"—the old undertaker looked at me with almost the affection of his look at Nan—"perhaps the prince has arrive—aha! Virgin! Yet—perhaps not. Who can tell? Oh, she joll' us all so! She tell us prince will arrive when prince is with——

When some one tear corner down. Now who can understand such!"

Nan moved toward the door.

The old man looked smilingly after her:

"It will be," he repeated, "as if I buried a jewel!"

XLV

RAFFAELLITA

THE door opened so softly that I scarce heard it. Yet I looked. A young girl entered. She seemed a beggar. A shawl was over her head. In her arms she carried a child. This was covered entirely from view by the closely wrapped shawl. She lifted her face. It was beautiful. Some message flashed between the girl and the tall old man.

Nan, too, had seen her. I heard her whisper to the undertaker—

"Raffaellita?"

The poor old man nodded drearily.

Nan flew to the girl, and instantly had her arm half around her, talking in a low voice. I saw the girl's head go lower and lower.

Said the old undertaker to my wonder-look—

"It is my daughter. She is dizgrace. The child. It is bastar'. I do not speak to her—except I must. I do not feed her—except she starve. I do not clothe her—except she freeze. She is not my daughter. She is beggar. I cannot kill the man. She send him to Italy that I do not. It is too far. Her mother is die of shame. This is my sorrow, signore. The daughter of the angels know. I have told her. She have say the comforting things. But till to-day she have not seen my daughter."

Dumbfounded by the sudden tragedy projected into our joy, I was silent. But wrath had begun to thunder in my soul. I looked at the pretty young outcast. Her father followed my eyes.

"She starve. That I can see. She has not eaten for many days. When you go I shall give her a loaf of bread. Perhaps two. Then she will go. There will be no words—only the bread. No one will give her food because so I wish it—because I am honour in this my country. One day he took her to the villain Paythagoras. Be dam'! He tell her they marry! Twenty-fi' cent! My God! Virgin! Did you know that is a bandit—that Paythagoras? God dam'! The Virgin petition that he be dam'!

"To you I say this—not to the daughter of the angels. But some day, when she tell me she go there, it shall escape me. Why do you let her? Ah, you do not know. You are come here to-day first. I must not make you distract of our country. It is others that go her there. She! My God! Virgin! She is not like the rest that go. It must be that she do not know that he is a villain—bandit—thief—liar—assassin—and other words of dam' that I do not yet speak to you until you come again."

I disregarded—scarcely heard—this rapid malediction in resentment at the dreadful fate of the girl. In these slums—wandering alone—day and night—with the tenderness and beauty I saw——

"How old is she?" I asked.

"Fifteen."

"And you, her father, have turned her into the street when she most needs you?"

Now my wrath had reached unbridled ebullition.

"She is dizgrace," said the old man.

"And you want to disgrace her yet more! Your own flesh and blood! If you don't open your doors to her instantly, I'll see that you are sent to prison!"

My threat did not frighten the poor old man. I saw now that he had perhaps agonized every phase of the situation, and that this one was not new. He asked me softly—

"Would you open your doors—if she was yours?"

"Yes!" I thundered. "Ten thousand times yes!"

Instead of offence, a strange joy flooded the old man's face. Some weariness which I had noticed be-

fore left it, and peace took its place. It spoke in his voice.

"You would forgive her?" he now asked avariciously.

"Yes—with all a father's heart!"

"And love her?"

"Yes—more than before!"

"It is a year," he said. "It is ver' long time!"

We were both looking at the piteous face of the girl. Nan had won a brief smile from her. She was uncovering the baby's face, that Nan might see it. And as we looked, Nan put her own dear face down upon that of the little waif. Tears welled into the eyes of the girl-mother. Tears answered them in the eyes of the father. I've forgotten what mine were doing. I wonder what Nan's were at?

My wrath still reverberated, as I sternly said—

"Go to her and tell her to come home!"

Nan put her arm through mine.

"S-sh!" she said happily. "I have heard every word, Jock, and it was—*good*—but too loud!"

She left me, and took the old man by the arm.

"Come!" she said, and led him toward his daughter.

"I shall say," he protested tremulously, "that the daughter of the angels commanded it—when my neighbours chide me—when they say I broke my word—I shall say that."

He went with unwilling joy.

They reached the girl and her child. I saw her stare with wide, unbelieving eyes as her father bent over her. When he put his old arms about her she sobbed.

Nan drew me thence.

"Jock," she whispered, "he only wanted an excuse! And you gave it to him."

"You," I insisted.

"You," murmured Nan. Then: "How strange that any one should need an excuse to take back one he loves!"

"Remember, Nan dear, that she has sinned."

"Even after sin!"

She looked up at me.

"I heard what you said to her father. And when you are angry in that righteous fashion, you tell the truth—hot from your heart! I was not sure before. I sometimes fancy, like most people who have never sinned, you cannot understand—or forgive them that do—as God does. Most of them—the sinless ones—are better than God. But now I know that *you* would do just what you told him to do. And God bless you for it! Have I ever told you which two people in the Bible I like best?"

"No," laughed I, suspecting one of Nan's whimsies, I regret to say.

"The thieves on the cross. It seems like home to be with them."

I withdrew the rose from Nan's hair.

She withheld my hands and objected.

"I adore him, Jock! And think *how* he adores me! I wouldn't think of throwing away his poor, poor rose!"

She had it in her hand, caressing its petals.

"I saw where he got it," said I. "It had been to a funeral."

Nan stared at me in horror. The rose dropped through her fingers to the pavement. She looked down at it.

"Oh, the dear old thing!" she cried.

"To rob the grave for us!" I gibed happily.

"After all, Jock dear, why should one be shocked at that? Is not death beautiful? It may have been some young girl—oh—one who died and left her love behind. Is not that beautiful? Or one who died because she had no love. Then I should be glad to wear it. Or a young man—brave and splendid, who fell in the front of the fight! Or one who was a coward and was shot in the back—yet couldn't help being a coward. Or an old, old man or woman who was tired. Perhaps had some one over there he or she wanted to see! Or one who died with a soft, old, withered hand in his—hers—destined to be left behind!"

"I wish we'd kept the rose," I only half laughed.

"Or, Jock, a man like you!"

"Or a Nan—like you!"

She seemed not to have heard me.

"Why, Jock, if *you* should die, I would keep your funeral roses always. And if I should die, wouldn't you like to keep one of *my* roses? Oh, the tiniest one of them all? And to think that it had touched my lips, perhaps—had been on my cold heart, perhaps—in my hair? Jock, dear Jock!"

Her small hand found its way caressingly into mine. Something choked me.

"Wouldn't you, Jock?"

"Yes," I answered, and could answer no more. For on my lips, nearer to speech than ever before, trembled the words I knew I must not speak—which I hope Nan knew I would not speak.

Ah, perhaps Nan understood—and helped me.

"Jock, let us go back and get the dear rose."

We did.

XLVI

LOVE MAKES NOTHING SOMETHING

AT the last, as we went, I understood. Here Nan was free! Think of the trammels in which a young woman lives in the world! But here Nan could doff them all! Yes—here Nan was free! And here she had told the truth—right out of her heart! Do you remember her outburst? I did. And now I understood it better. And now I loved this strange country, in the heart of an alien city, as Nan did. I could have lived and died here with her.

"Jock, are you tired of my country?"

"Why—*you* are there!"

"Jock! That's nice. Oh, but I'm *glad* you came! Isn't it a lovely country? No one lies or deceives—they live on the front door-steps—not in stuffy houses—and the dogs and cats live with them—and the garlic smells to heaven—and everybody loves somebody—a lot of bodies—and there is music—and nobody must marry anybody they don't want to marry—and there are no proprieties or conventions—and they are *people*—not things—and I adore them—and they adore me—and——"

"That's the reason it's such a lovely country?"

"Yes," whispered Nan, smiling up at me and taking my arm again. "Why, poky old Jock! Don't you know that it's that which makes everything anything!"

"And nothing something?" I gibed, with the intention of impenetrable subtlety.

But Nan fairly leaped at my phrase.

"Yes, yes, yes! Nobody—absolutely nobody ever

put it so happily! Jock—dear old poky Jock—I am proud of you! It makes nothing something!"

"It is a reversible phrase," said I. "You might mistake and say that it makes something nothing—and maybe you'd be nearer the truth!"

"No!" cried Nan, in immense triumph. "This is it, and nothing else is it. It makes *nothing everything!*"

"'Absolutely nobody ever put it so happily,'" I quoted.

"No!" agreed Nan, laughing. "We're *not* a dull family. Even I am not."

"Nan dear," chided I very happily, "you have been making a fool of *me* all through this world of yours, as you call it."

"Yes, Jock. What is the use of accusing me over and over. I did, I did, I did! I've told them—all—about you—Glück—Bunnie—Crinodore—all!"

We were silent a moment.

"Jock—oh, dear, dear Jock, don't you—and Glück—understand why?"

"No," said I. "If it had been done that I might hear of it—— But you did not mean me to know that you had——"

"Glorified you!" whispered Nan.

"Glück," said I.

"Of course! Glück, too! I supposed we both understood *that*," said Nan. "Glück didn't mind. He liked it. And I supposed that you would never come here, and I could tell any little lie about *you* I liked."

Nan laughed softly, and possessed me.

"Jock, you're lovely—to-day! If we go on like this, there will come a day when I shall be lovely, too."

She halted awhile. I was silent.

"And when *you* will tell *me* so—as you don't—to-day!"

Then a plunge.

XLVII

GLÜCK ENTERED

"OH, Jock! The priest! Paythagoras! The lovely rascal—as everybody calls him!"

She pulled towards a dirty narrow stairway. I pulled back.

"We almost passed him, Jock—and he is the best fun of all! Please! Don't you like fun?"

Still I pulled back. Nan does not know to this day, I think, that it was only that I might be pulled forward. I had forgotten the words of Signore Raffaelle.

"Jock, this is the very last place. Can't you endure one more—with me? Jock, *he* has a *green* lantern!"

"Oh—of course—if he has a green lantern!" I groaned dismally.

We squeezed up the stairway. Nan knocked reverently upon a sagging door, and said:

"S-sh!"

"Nan," I whispered, "I have been ill!"

She turned upon me suddenly, there in the dark stairway. She put her hands on my shoulders and looked simply into my face. I was one step below her.

"In bed, Jock?" she asked.

"Yes—part of the time."

Again she said, in a very wondrous voice:

"Yes. You are thin and pale. I have been such a fool all the day that I did not notice it. Forgive me! I have been so happy! Why did you not send for me, Jock? Surely your cousin—might——"

"Yes, my cousin might come to me. But suppose besides being my cousin——"

"I should be your fiancée? All the better. Oh, Jock! I thought you had stopped saving me. Don't you see how easy it is to backslide? Jock, this is a lesson for you. You must *never* stop saving me. I can never stop backsliding if you do."

Had we stood a moment more—had another word been spoken — I should have taken Nan in my arms.

The door opened, and a green light which flashed out upon me made me put up my hand.

"Jock, let us go—home," whispered Nan.

"Home!" said I, rather wildly. "Yes!"

The lank-locked young man who stood in the door invited us to enter.

"Let us go *in*," laughed Nan. "Maybe it would be dangerous to go home."

The lank young man said something in a lingo I did not understand, and we entered. The priest was indeed lighted, where he sat on the floor, by an unearthly green lantern. He had a beard which was lost in the darkness. On his head was something like a mitre. I felt repulsed by the place. It was sinister.

Nan kowtowed and sat on the floor in front of the priest. She said something I did not understand, then pinched me. I sat at her side.

"I don't know what it is, Jock. Some of the Cawdor Greek, I *think*. But it always starts him to incanting. Now! The young man—the beautiful young man—is studying for the priesthood, and he interprets. Here goes! We're off!"

Nan laughed. I was displeased, yet rather fascinated by the curious ceremony.

Something went on finally which was so suggestive that I asked the young priest what it meant.

"Marry," said he shortly. "It is done."

He held out his hand for money.

"What? Married?"

We both shouted it at once. I flew into a rage. Nan did the better thing—as always—and laughed.

"The lady is marry," the now puzzled young priest went on. "She come often say she like be sometime marry. I do not know for how. Sometime she think she will bring young man. Well?"

His glance was toward me.

I said nothing, and he went on.

"'Tis not same young man. But—what for is it if not marry?"

"Married! Without our knowledge or consent! Oh, Jock, isn't it too lovely for anything!"

"Here is it where Greek people—both man and woman—come to git marry. Other people also kin. Well?" Again that look of questioning to me. "What do you then come for? This little ago I ask you. Is it to be marry? The lady say yes. You do not."

"Then I am married and he is not?"

The student-priest was brought to a standstill by this. He referred it to his superior. It was evidently a difficult status.

"He dunno. I dunno. He thinks yes."

Nan laughed:

"He ask all the question. You answer all the question. Why is it you do that if you do not wish to be marry?"

This accusation was hurled at Nan.

"There, there, there!" cooed Nan. "It is all right. It is my fault — my own fault — if I am married!"

She gave the man some money.

"It's not all right!" I thundered.

"Please, Jock, don't mind! It is only I who am married—to you. You are not married—to me. Don't bother. And I suppose it is as easy to get a divorce from you as to get married to you."

"No doubt!"

"Let us go away—sadder but wiser. I don't think it's very nice to get one's divorce on the same day one is married. I'll wait a little. Come!"

"Good heavens, Nan, you talk as if it were nothing! Married! I'll see that he's arrested and his den fumigated."

"Jock, I don't think it's nice that you should be so furious at my being married to you. Jock, there are some people who wouldn't be!"

And in all the trifling there was a curious note of piteousness which rang true. Yet, somehow, this only made my anger to grow.

"Oh," said I fatuously, "I have no doubt there are some who would be — glad! Even in this fashion!"

"Jock!"

"Yes!"

Nan's voice grew hard and cold as steel.

"Yes, Jock, some would be glad."

My anger grew white hot.

"Come out of this den!"

I grasped Nan rudely by the arm.

"I don't think I promised to obey. I'll ask him if that was in it."

But, for all that, the poor little butterfly's voice shook, and she was ready to plunge her face into her hands and cry. She knew vaguely that she had gone too far.

"Nan,"—I stooped and whispered it—"come with me. This is a vile place. And you must never come here again. You could not have known. It is bad—for—you—me—any one. Can't you trust me to know—that it is not good for you?"

"Yes, Jock."

She was only the little Nan of our childhood at that moment.

"This fellow means to be bad. Nan, I ought not to speak of it—but—Raffaellita——"

Nan looked up at me with horror in her face.

"Yes, Jock dear," she whispered. "I am so glad that *you* came with me! Come! Take me away! I am afraid—afraid—afraid! Hurry!"

She held up her hands, and was rising to go.

Glück entered.

"Ah-h-h! *Same* young man!" joyed the young priest. "Now will be *both* marry?"

Glück laughed.

"I thought I'd better help you to backslide. And the old priest wants to marry us again! Well—shall we be married again? Aha, ha, ha!"

Nan sank back to her place guiltily.

XLVIII

NOT AU REVOIR—GOOD-BYE

GLÜCK dropped down intimately beside Nan. She seemed turned to stone. He recognized me.

"Why, how's this?" he whispered angrily to Nan.

"It's Mr. Merival," said Nan, in a voice almost strange to me.

"I'm likely to know him," said Glück surlily.

"Then speak to him," said Nan in agony. "Explain —to him!"

"I want no speech with him—but you!" I cried.

Nan looked up at me for one little moment. Had I not been possessed of the devil, I could have seen there her innocency and my own brutality.

"Jock," she whispered, "I told you—only a minute ago—the truth."

"My God!"

It escaped me in one long imprecation.

No answer came from Nan.

"Nan! Did you have an appointment with this fellow? I fancied your references to him were—fun! But now—— A word! Look at me! Speak! Unless you do, there is but one conclusion to be drawn! *Must* I draw that? Do you *wish* me to draw it?"

Nan remained silent.

"You have an escort," I said. "And you are in your own country—quite as you say. His. You do not need me. Pardon me if I go. If you can afford to let it remain so—I must. Good-bye."

"Jock," begged Nan, "you do not understand."

"Yes," said I. "I do understand. But I need not 'understand' further. I am free—from the necessity for understanding—saving you.

"And this is the man to whom all the people have referred! *This* is the one you have paraded here as your prince! This is the one of whom you told me the day you confessed that you loved some one! This is he whom you are to wound—and then to heal.

"*This* is the dishonour of which the astrologiste spoke! The dishonour which you would seek—which was to bring you love!" I laughed odiously, and pointed to where I thought Glück cringed, but where I am sure now he preened himself. "Him! I remember that you begged that *he* might be left when the rest were 'bounced'! I remember now that all you have said about loving was of him! A palmist! Understand!" Again I laughed. "Remember Cawdor! Do you fancy that Cawdor will want to be remembered by the sweetheart of a palmist? The client of a procurer? Heavens! Was it this—could it have been this you thought of when you said, a little while ago, that love was everything? Can it be that it has always been this poor thing—and nothing—nobody else?"

I stood awhile above Nan's head. Then I demanded an answer to my foolish question.

"Yes," whispered Nan.

I laughed hideously and went.

"Jock!" Nan stopped me as I was going. "You think I didn't play fair?"

"I think you lied," I said.

I saw the first real terror in Nan's face.

"You lied to me!" I repeated, in the fury which is cruel even to torture. "You have always lied!"

"Yes," whispered Nan.

She dropped her head into her hands once more.

"You have been receiving this 'poor thing' ever since you pretended to dismiss him! Just as before—meeting him here—on corners—in cellars—garrets. You are something inexpressible!"

"Yes," Nan whispered again, her head going a little lower.

"Good-bye!" I cried:

"Good-bye."

"Not au revoir—*good-bye!* Do you hear? Do *you* understand?"

Nan nodded.

My fury lasted for four blocks. Then suddenly I hurried back. Glück must be knocked down—perhaps killed. I had forgotten that.

At the end of the third block I saw her going down the cross street. She had Glück's arm. She was catching and releasing it as she used to catch and release mine. They were laughing. About me—there could be no doubt of that!

Turning homeward, I cursed myself for a fool.

XLIX

GLÜCK MUST BE KILLED

BUT such a mood of horrors can last only a little while at the most—good God! At the worst—when recollection comes!

Ah, my repentance was deep. I did not think I could be such a brute. And to Nan! The dear little thing who had drunk with me out of the streams! I saw her thus—I saw her bowed head—she had answered, "Yes, yes, yes," to all my accusations! Yet who but Nan would have done that? Who but Nan would not have piled lie upon lie, until one was sheerly bewildered out of the truth? And I a man—six feet one! She a woman—just to my shoulder! It was as if I had struck her in the face. Glück was forgotten, and all the other Poor Things! What a pitiable excuse they were for brutality to Nan! Within an hour of the time I had counselled Raffaelle to forgive his daughter I had denounced Nan!

And why had I, who prided myself upon being different from other men, done just what they would have done, and—what is always an unjust and despicable thing to do to a woman—flown at once to the worst instead of the best conclusion upon the facts?

Thank God, I had now reversed myself, and come to the best that could be predicated upon the facts—and they were more damning to me than to Nan;

It was characteristic that I should remember longest and most bitterly Nan's laughter at me and her intimacies with Glück after I had gone back. But I remem-

bered, also, that Nan had been that way to me when she was most desperately hurt—indeed, she was extremely likely to be that way when she was desperately hurt.

But, what to do?

Nan and I must not go on in this way. I was not fulfilling my obligation to Aunt Izzy. And it was a time of great danger—for Nan! Without me, God knew what she might do!

The matter must, therefore, be arranged speedily—for Nan's sake.

And—Nan had always found a way to bridge over these—trifles.

I still felt that Glück must be killed.

But to Nan this was evidently not a trifle. She found no way. I heard—saw—nothing of her.

L

ARE THE BONDS OF HONOUR IRREFRAGABLE ?

THERE was but one thing to do—go to see Nan. Nausicaa, after some communion by way of the back stairs, brought me a note.

" I'm sorry, too," it said. " You were unjust—cruel —cruel—cruel—to me ! But it is over. I understand what your coming means. You are not to speak of it. I could not endure it. You must take me as I am. You must try to believe that I am not that. Once I railed at your ' trusting ' me. Now I say that you must take me on trust—or leave me. If the former—come up. I am in my lair. We will mingle our tears. If the latter do not—but go and forget.

" NAN."

Nausicaa followed me to the steps.

" She's been crying, crying, crying," she said.

Nan looked infinitely wan and tired. She lay back in a long chair and held out a languid hand to me. She smiled.

I took it—and kissed it—with tears. For, notwithstanding our truce, I knew, in her pure presence, that she was innocent even in thought of what I had so brutally charged. I wanted to say this. The very atmosphere of the pretty place spoke for Nan as she would not. My heart seemed bursting with remorse. Nan ! This dainty—almost diaphanous—creature in

the thin green garment! Nan understood. As I stooped to her hand, she put her other one into my hair.

"Jock," she said, "I understand. But we are not to speak of it—it is not necessary—nor anything but—foolishness to-day. It will be dangerous—anything but foolishness. I shall say—damn—or something more sweet—and more worse, Jock! God bless you!"

She smiled—sighed—took her hand from me—relapsed wearily into her chair.

She looked at her hand. Then she looked over at me very wondrously, and half whispered:

"Jock, *your* tears, on *my* hand!"

Then, very hurriedly:

"Presto! It is all gone! But, oh, Jock! it *was* dangerous—the little while it lasted—wasn't it?"

But she did not let me answer. If she understood the danger, she also understood how to pass by it on the other side. She laughed lowly, while my heart was bursting with what I must not say—intensified a thousandfold by my wrong to Nan.

"Now *you* shall have a chance to say damn—or any Latin you know—Et tu, Brute, for instance. Jock—— Ho, for the foolishness—and safety—now!"

She had a penholder in her mouth.

"You have interrupted the confection of my first love-letter."

"Which I regret exceedingly," I said. "A love-letter is one of the things which, 'seen too oft, familiar with its face, we first endure, then pity, then embrace.'" Rather stupidly funny! But that was the only kind of fun possible to me that day.

I remained standing. These intimate, fragrant, feminine surroundings seemed in a vague sense too sacred for a man. They all bore the impress of Nan's life of sheer innocency, which I had dared to doubt, which a man ought to believe to the end, no matter what that be.

"It was a peach," sighed Nan.

I winced. Nan laughed, and tore the letter across.

"Cawdor always writes me such ladylike letters, beginning, 'My dear Cousin.' And I write him such manly

ones, beginning ' Dear Boy ' or ' Dear Old Man.' Once he called me ' Nancy.' I have always meant to shock him for that. This would have done it ! "

" What a pity ! "

I rescued the two parts from the waste-basket and fitted them together. Nan snatched vainly at the pieces.

" You will regret it ! " she warned, and snatched no more. " Remember to be foolish—like me ! "

I brazenly read what I had found.

" ' Once upon a time a big brave beautiful little boy——' "

" I didn't know there were so many b's," laughed Nan. " And that you were both big and little."

" ' —took this small hand which writes to you and doubled it up in his—so that you couldn't see where it had gone. Then he said, " Little sweetheart, in that wee hand you will some day hold all my happiness—perhaps all my life." " Can't I hold it now ? " said I. " Will you ? " he asked. " Yes," I answered, " it's so small." " And will you *keep* it ? " he asked again. " Always," I answered. " For ever and ever ? " " For ever and ever and ever ! " " And when I grow up—or rather when you grow up, for I am grown up now—will you give it to me—the hand—and the happiness in it ? " " Yes," I said. " To keep ? " " Yes." " You will marry me ? " " Yes." " We're engaged ? " " Yes." " And no one else can ever——" " Not on your life ! " ' "

I looked up, and said to Nan :

" That was I ! It was I said that ! "

Nan was looking afar out of the window. I read on :

" ' —And won't you stop a moment and think of her now as she was then—and then see whether you *can* think such things of her as you said—or say them again ? —and, then, won't you forgive her—not for that—she isn't guilty of that—but for all her other sins against you—which are enough ? Just as you would have done in the old graveyard—or if she were dead—and you had a little white rose ? Now, when she, grown to be a

woman, needs you so much more than she did then—when she was only a little girl? When she is wearing your mother's ring? And if you forgive her, won't you come and hear her say that she——'"

The letter ended here. I went to the window and looked steadily out. But I cannot remember having seen a thing. Presently I heard the rustle of soft silk behind me.

"Jock dear, what do you think of my first attempt? Am I too old to learn?"

She was laughing lowly—but was ready to sob.

"It was I," I said. "And you laugh!"

I spoke against the panes.

"Was it? Yes, it must have been—it *was*—yes, *you*. I never could invent anything so sweet—nor so—terrible, you know. So I suppose I unconsciously fished it up out of my memory. But—yes, *you* were full of such lovely inventions. I did not know till the other day of the terrible ones! Yes—it *must* have been you. Thank you!"

"Curse me!" I laughed between my teeth. I was on the rack, I think.

"For what, Jock?"—in terror.

"For an ass! A poor relation! A hanger-on! A nobody! A brute! A fool with emotions—which inspire only ridicule! A romantic! A pauper!"

Silence.

"You *are* poor, Jock—thanks to me."

Another silence.

"But you are not those other dreadful things—not one of them!"

"All of them!" I insisted. "And more!"

"What else?"

"A clown! A jester who must turn his most sacred emotions into merriment! One who must pretend to be a fool when he is not. And not a fool when he is. My God!"

Something within me was undammed! And Nan's tumultuous heart beat time to mine. Her eyes deepened and widened and glowed. She did not check me.

"Coin one's most serious soul into fooleries for the

amusement of—the queen! Once I saw a picture. It was a clown—in the dressing-tent of a circus. He had been that moment called from the ring. The paint—white, with idiotic blue and red dots—was still on his face. The painted grimace was there. The fool's cap was on his head. The fool's bauble lay at his feet. At his feet, too—all about him—knelt such as he—weeping—weeping with grinning painted faces! There was the glare of gases—the shimmer of tinsel—almost the smell of sawdust! One could hear the bells. In his arms the broken-hearted fool held his dying child!"

"Jock!" It was a terrified whisper.

"That is I!" I cried, breathing sharply.

Nan's breathing matched mine.

"Jock dear, while you have been away from me I have thought of thousands and thousands of things! And one of them, at least, I understand. You have been making love to me all the time——"

"Nan!" I chided.

"From the very first moment! Yes. You didn't know it, perhaps. Perhaps I only suspected it at first. But I know it now. And I know that I not only let you—I encouraged you. I tempted you. Because—oh, Jock—it—was—sweet! Yes! But then I am to suffer. Oh, it was so hard a problem for me! That is what I could not endure—that is what made me mad. I see it all now. There was no way! None! If you had tried to *win* me from Cawdor—to *woo* me—I should have hated you! And yet—and yet—how I wanted to be wooed! How I wanted to be won! Taken!"

She repeated this word wondrously.

"Oh, Jock! If you *had* taken me! If you had knocked me down—or given me drugs—and married me to you while I was unconscious! Oh!"

"I'll do it yet!" I threatened:

"It's too late. Now we *know*. I would be as guilty as you. Guilty! Yet, what would a woman care for that? Guilty! Dishonoured! These words frighten a man. But not a woman, if she thereby gets"—she stopped to laugh—"Jock!" she finished, flinging me a kiss.

"Yes!" I said between my set teeth. "That is it! Let us laugh—while we murder——"

"No, Jock," said Nan softly. "Let us be serious—if you like—if you do not think it—dangerous!"

"It is dangerous. There is but one way. I must laugh my painted laugh—the one the world has painted on my face, while my heart breaks! I!"

Again, only—

"Jock!"

"Yes!" I went on blindly, "I'm a fool with a jest on my lips, paint on my face, a grimace, in fool's clothing—with the dearest thing God ever sent into the world locked fast—smothering—in my heart!"

There was another silence between us. Then Nan whispered, even more strangely—

"Jock, what is it smothering in your heart?"

I said nothing.

"Jock, I never saw you so—strange! Oh, you are *so*—strange! What is it locked in your dear heart?"

"My love!"

"Your—love! Your love!" whispered wondrously.

"Yes! I have more of that one sweet, damned thing to give than ever man gave to woman! But that is all I have. Why did God give such largess of that to me—and then make me poor—a fool? He should have given it to some one who had not to be a mountebank. Some of the princes—some of the élite of His world!"

"Jock, Jock, you are *strange!*"

And Nan, drawn, perhaps, by my fervid speech, came closely, irresistibly upon me.

"God does not give it to them, dear Jock—perhaps because He gives them so much else that is dross. He gives love to—you—perhaps because it is the best thing—He has."

She held out her arms to me.

"Jock, who is it you love so—very—very—much?"

I remembered, and laughed hoarsely.

"Who? Good God! *You* ask *that!*"

Nan sorrowfully retreated. She shivered.

"Remember Cawdor!" I laughed brutishly.

Silence.

" Jock dear—let us get back to the safe foolishness ! "

Then, over my shoulder, with the perfume of violets—

" I had to amuse myself somehow. Think of it, Jock ! Two weeks, nearly ! Shall I tell you all the hours and minutes ? No ? And you had frightened me so about Count Porphory that I was not at home to him three times. I—Jock—I had sent for him. Before we went to Little Italy. But then I was afraid to receive him. I thought of you. Your terrible eyes—your terrible voice—your terrible words ! How pale and awful your face was ! And I didn't sleep very well. And, Jock, don't be angry any more ! Jock, you made me cry, cry, cry ! And I was very unhappy. You don't want me to cry, Jock, and be unhappy—do you ? "

I answered her thus—

" Is *this* safe foolishness ? "

Nan retreated a little.

" No," she whispered, with drooping beautiful head. " Jock, I cannot be foolish any more ! "

She cried it.

" You are quite saved," I tried to counsel. " I must not come here any more. I must save myself now ! "

" Yes ! Oh, Jock, once, when we could still be foolish —you said that in saving me *you* might be lost. Do you remember ? It was the day I tried the hat on your beautiful old head ! "

" I remember ! " I answered.

God ! What did I not remember then ?

" Are you—*lost*, dear, dear Jock ? Is it as bad as that ? "

" Yes."

" Oh, that is so sad ! "

" Not so sad as that you are ' saved '—for some one else ! "

" I suppose you are right," she sighed. " I suppose that you have saved me—for some one else—to whom I must now go—and there is no need for you to come here any more. Because, Jock, I am afraid to do those daring things now. Once they did not seem daring. But now I am afraid to do anything without asking you —and you are not here, and are never to come any more,

and I—I am to go away! To another! I never used to think. Now I think a lot. I wonder if it is good for me? No! A woman should not think—too much. Oh, it is better for a woman to talk, talk, talk! Everything out of her heart! So that there is nothing there that ought not to be! Yes; but to whom? Oh, it must be some one who—understands! Who has felt! Lived! Jock, do you know what I think? That is how hearts are broken! Yes! Women must lock everything in their hearts—till they break! Don't you think that sad, Jock—to save a girl and then to have to leave her so lonely—oh, so lonely!—waiting for some one who is not like you—not like you!—and never, never again to come to help her unload her heart?"

I said nothing, nor did she more, for a space. Then I felt her hand creep into mine. I fear I gave it glad hospitality.

"Jock,"—she was whispering now—"danger! Back to the foolishness. It was not to you—oh, no! Did you think it was to *you?*"

"Yes," I said. "But I know my place!"

"No, Jock; really it was just to amuse me. Oh, it wasn't to *any* one. Jock, you wouldn't have *wished* it to be to—*you?*"

I turned slowly upon her.

She laughed, yet she trembled.

"Jock," she went on gaily, "now I *will* tell you. Everybody is writing love-letters to be printed, and I thought I would try what I could do. Do you think any editor would look at—a lot of such ones?"

Still I only looked—at all her immaculate daintiness—the joy and sorrow together in her dear eyes—the hunger she had once spoken of—the piteous hunger for what I had. My heart leaped up at the thought of what might be. Then it dropped at the thought of what was.

"Of what are you thinking, Jock? No, no, no! Don't tell me! For God's sake—be—be—very foolish!"

"That I am a clerk—upon a salary. That *I* have no career. That Cawdor has a noble one! That I am nothing much—nobody in particular; that I have no-

thing to give to any woman on earth—I, who would give all I had!"

Some vast emotion stirred Nan.

"Jock, that is untrue. Nobody think those things but you. You are more than just to everybody else—you are generous. Be at least just to yourself. *You* know what you are! So do—I—thank the good God! Now, there! Be foolish—for God's sake!"

The thing within leaped again. Then I thought of Aunt Izzy's letter.

"And Cawdor! Lucky Cawdor!"

Nan stalked away from me tigerishly.

"I forbid you to ever mention his name again!" she flashed.

Thus we stood for a moment—almost embattled. Then Nan said:

"No. Forgive me. I was angry—without cause. You are right to mention his name to me at this time. I forgot. You were about to. In a moment you would have made of me—I would have made of you—something vile."

She stood and looked at me straightly.

"Listen—listen, while I say—as fast as I can—that whatever may happen, you—I—I shall *not* do that! We could not look into each other's face afterward. You are to go—now! You are to find some one you can love! In that great way you just spoke of. You are to marry her! You are never to see me again! Go! I want you to go! And now! At once! I can endure no more!"

How *could* I go then?

LI

LOVE, THE BUCCANEER

"AND you? Is that the end *you* wish?"

"I? No. Oh, I shall bless you always—I shall thank God that I knew you! I shall remember, when I pray, that you gave me more happiness than any girl ever had! Yes! For once we are face to face—unmasked! So let it be—for once and never again! Go! Find some one who deserves you—whom you deserve. I do not. Bring her to me, that I may tell her what splendours of joy you have for her! Yes! For I—I *know!* I have *seen* it all! Almost I have touched it! Let me thank you for all the happiness you have given me! Let me say that it will be more sweet than anything on earth to think that there shall not be one reproach! Not one brief regret for a word you have said—for a thing you have done! Nothing but joy! Joy! Hear me say that you are the sweetest—best and bravest—poorest—man I know. Do not forget me! I cannot forget you. Go, for God's sake! Go!"

In the silence we each heard the other's desperate breathing.

"Yes," I said, "I must go—and—yes—at once!"

The words were brave enough. Alas! It was only the words which were brave.

"And let her know," cried Nan, vibrantly, "what you are giving her. When she comes—when you find her—when she finds you—don't say to her the things

you have said to me! To me it does not matter. I am not worthy of anything better. I am only a butterfly! An ephemera! One who must be *saved!* But to *her*—she who will be worthy of you—she who will understand all that you are—give her all you have to give—and if she is a woman she will give you all she has! It will never be as much as you give, because it cannot be. No one has so much of what a woman want—oh, God—*needs!*—as you! But be generous! Keep nothing! Ask all! Go, go, go! I am at the end of my strength. And God bless you!"

"Nan," I said, "for heaven's sake be merciful!"

She looked at me a long moment.

"Yes—for heaven's sake—not for yours, or mine."

She paced slowly back to her chair. I saw her pass her hands over her face as mesmerists do when awakening a subject. I followed her presently.

"We are very serious to-day, Jock," she smiled up at me. "I think I never was so—serious. What is it?"

Nan was not beautiful in the classical sense. But as I looked down on her and she looked up at me, she seemed quite divine.

"Shall I tell you?" I asked.

She drooped her head:

"Tell me."

But I did not. We stood there, a man and a woman, with nothing between us to prevent dishonour but honour.

"Nan," I begged, "don't let me. Yes—make me go—as you used to."

"Jock, I must know now—I am broken—done—I must hear you say it! It is too late!"

"I shall open my lips only to jeopardize the one thing a man holds dearer than a woman's love. Once you said you would save me if the need came. The need is here. Save me! I cannot save myself!"

She looked up, a strange joy in her face reddening her cheeks, distending her nostrils, trembling on her lips. She had given up. She was mine, if I dared to take her!

"I didn't know—there was such a thing—a thing a man could hold dearer than a woman's love."

I could not answer.

"Nothing is dearer to a woman than a man's love, I think—nothing!"

Her handkerchief fell to the floor. I stooped to pick it up. She held me there before her on my knees—with her hand on my hand. She looked vanquished.

"Jock, tell me what it is that a man holds dearer than a woman's love? See! I am quite calm. You can talk to me about everything—anything—and I to you—to-day—quite calmly. Tell me. It is too late! I cannot let it pass. I must know!"

"Honour," I said.

"Honour!" She repeated the word over and over, then was very quiet. I did not disturb her. "I did not think of that—to-day! I did not! It has never been out of my mind till—to-day. What was it I was reading about honour to-day? Strange!"

She took up the book at her elbow. She showed me the title. It was:

LOVE, THE BUCCANEER.

"'But,'" she read, "'if one has the very woman one loves, shall one contend about mere honour? Is not love above honour? Love is a buccaneer. Has he not a right to her wherever—however—he finds her? If she love him—why, love is a buccaneer! Duty! Suppose she has given the other one the most splendid years of her life—waiting. Must she wait for ever? Must she wait even after he has come whom she loves? Who loves her? Are the chains of honour irrefragable?'"

She looked up at me, very white and wan.

"Jock, *are* they?"

"*Are* they?"

She did not answer. She shuddered, and went to the window. I sent my question after her.

"*Are they?*"

She turned. Her face was quiet. Her words were quiet. I had never heard such from her.

"For *me*—no! For *you*—yes! I could not love a

man who had given his honour for my love. I should despise him!"

"But, Nan," I begged, "for God's sake, think of what he gives you too if he keeps his honour."

"I do. God bless you for speaking the word! *I* had almost forgotten it."

Still her face was quiet, but now very pale.

"And that is better with honour than this with dishonour?"

Her head drooped slowly to her breast.

"Yes."

"Nan," I said, "in God's name — where is my hat?"

She put it into my hand. I stood a moment, and then she led me gently down the stairs.

Below, we stood for a long moment face to face. I read her soul. She read mine. Not a word passed.

Then she said, with infinite softness:

"Remember Cawdor—as I do at this moment! And, more and better, remember honour—as I may not —to-morrow—when the terror comes!"

She let me out and closed the door, lingeringly, with her eyes upon my face to the last.

"Remember, too,"—Nan's last whisper, with a sob of anguish, just as the door closed—"that I saved *you!* Tell—her—so—when you find her."

A moment I stood there, debating, rebelling, savage with the primeval fury of the animal despoiled of its mate.

Then, through the door, I heard a cry such as I had never before heard from human lips. And my name! As no human lips had ever uttered it! Like a prayer from one tortured into speech!

"Jock! Come back! Jock, my darling!"

I charged the door madly.

"I—thought—you—had—gone!"

The sobbing ceased.

"Open the door!" I cried.

"No!" whispered the voice within, hurtling with a greater agony.

* * * * *

I heard her go slowly up the stairs. As she went, she said :

" No—no—no——"

Till her voice was lost.

LII

A WEEK PASSED—A MONTH. IT SEEMED MUCH MORE

AND then a week passed—a month. It seemed much more. Time, with his nepenthe, did nothing for me. And since this little history has become a confession (I did not at first mean it so), and since we are taught that confession, *pro salute animæ*, must be fundamental —hear that, in the sunny autumn days, I went alone to all the places where Nan and I had gone together. The park, where the red-yellow leaves flashed about me in falling, like Nan's cheeks and hair. The little streams, where now, indeed, I would have given the world to put my arm about Nan as she put her dear face into the water—so that she might not drown! I sat on the benches where she and I had sat—communing with fancies such as only a romantic fool like me could summon forth. I took the walks we had taken—with her laugh, her pretty temper, her swift repentance, the touches of her hands, her hair, her violetted atmosphere, her flashing teeth, her voice—all but Nan in the flesh! I saw again the startled old gentleman who had lost his hat, heard again the little damn—easy to forgive. I went into the millinery shop—to be stared at and chilled. I went through all those purlieus in the slums where Nan had taken me the day I was brutal to her, and found them sweeter and dearer than the most splendid parts of the most splendid city. Will you believe that I talked of her to the old undertaker? Asked about Raffaellita and her baby? That I explained her long absence to the barber—by a lie? That I met the levatrice on the street, and shook her fat and dirty hand? That I tried

to get Nan's babies to come with me? That they mistrusted me, without Nan, and would not? And they asked me whether she were not *dead*—and would scarce believe me when I said she was not. Else, why had she not come? For she was always happy there. And they adored her. I fancied, presently, that they accused me of her absence. For why was I there without her? I went no more.

I—was I guilty of the homicide of joy? These Poor Things did love Nan. And I, by one thing and another, had first taken them from her, and had then taken her from them. Now it seemed to me another cruel and brutal thing. What had I given her in exchange? What had I given the Poor Things in exchange for Nan? I had not even succeeded in the throes of dishonoured honour in giving Nan so poor a thing as myself for them: As to these—I had given them nothing! They would not have me! I felt like the pinchbeck they—I knew—thought me. I, who preached and was serious, was—yes—base metal. Nan, who laughed and was frivolous, was gold—to them.

Then, when the leaves had fallen and the trees were gaunt, and the earth and sky and air became melancholy as my mood, I forsook the park and all the outside world, where the terror of decay and death began to be foreshadowed, and lived within—with Nan.

I had played the 'cello. I found it good to take it up again. For all the lower notes sang Nan in the melancholy mezzo I love—and she—she loved.

And piteous little songs came forth—some as far off as my childhood—and comforted me.

Even such songs as Nan and I had sung together!

For this second parting from Nan had hurt. When the other came we had been children. Even that was not easy. But Nan was then grouped with football, dances, theatres, horses, other girls, and dogs. When she went away—nay, when I went away—all the rest had remained. But now Nan had gone! And the remaining everything was indeed nothing!

Perhaps I should not have been hurt. But I have never been as sorry for my vulnerability at Nan's hands

as, no doubt, you are for me. Shall I shock you when I say that I am glad I could be hurt by—Nan? And glad that I could be hurt by no other woman? Do you know that there are only a few people who can be hurt—by even Nan? And that to these is given the keeping of love?

At least that is another of the fancies which came in this time of fancies—which pardon, unless you also fancy that. Unless you also have times of moods.

Why did I not go to Nan? Is that your question?

The point of honour stood between us—bigger, more luminous, more threatening, than on that day of its imminent vanquishment, its peril since.

Once I wrote her a letter begging that the comradeship which had grown so sweet—as sweet as it was in our childhood—might continue—endure. But I put it into the fire. It *was* comradeship—yes. But it was also much more! And that could not be—that which was much more.

To one of the places of our meeting I had never gone. Without quite understanding why, the piquant sweetness and gaiety of the meeting which had occurred there was poignant now. But I yielded even that, one day when my mood was become an illness, and went—to the telegraph office.

LIII

AND THERE I SAW HER

AND there, that day, I saw Nan! Her dear face was pale and thin, and there was a piteous look of suffering in the wide eyes. Who would not have died to save Nan that look of suffering—and been glad! Yet it gave her a strange, unearthly beauty. It was as if my butterfly Nan had become a nun in white and black—with no austerity of nun—yet with eyes always down and rosary at waist.

Indeed, she *was* all in black, which clung softly about her and became her best.

Yet she seemed but the shade of the halcyon Nan who had sent me a "hurry-up" message from that same place.

She did not see me, though only a huge plate of glass intervened—she inside, I outside. Her look was far away—over my head. Before her was a message-blank. In her hand was a pen, upon which she bit. She had flung aside her boa. Her hat was tilted a little, showing more of her hair than was usual. Her fingers had evidently been recently in it, and had left a disorder which was charming.

Her problem appeared to be difficult. But slowly, as I looked in such fascination as I hope you may sometime know, it reached its solution. The suffering lifted from her pale face and grew into a smile. The pink came rioting into her cheeks.

She plunged upon the blank and wrote in Nan's lightning fashion. Then, as more joy flooded her face,

she suddenly tore that one up and wrote another. She read it. She laughed. She counted the words, and struck one out. Then another. Then she decided, after a look at the clock, not to make it a telegram, but a message.

For me! Of course! Who else could Nan be writing to—with that joy in her face! I remembered that other message, and wondered whether she had been as happy at that!

Still—suppose it was *not* for me!

She snatched an envelope and wrote my name! Of course!

Then, laughing, she did a curious thing. She took from her pocket-book a printed paper, wrote something at various places on it, folded it small, and put it into her glove.

From her muff she took then a photograph of herself and another of Porphory. On the back of each she hastily scribbled something. Then, as hastily, as if to forestall a possible change of mind, she inclosed both of these in the large envelope they had occupied and sealed and addressed it. I could not read the address. At last she gathered up her boa and purse, and went back to the desk to secure a messenger-boy, leaving the glove.

I laughed—the first since that day. Nan! Each little thing—Nan! Some curious persons had gathered to watch me. I was about to rush in—but Porphory and his photograph gave me pause now. The curious people closed up. Nan would not like such an audience—their faces pressed against the window. Nor, indeed, would I. I would fool the curious people, and wait around the corner—and arrive earlier than Nan could possibly have expected. But, no; I remembered that the boys were instructed to not deliver messages to strangers on the street, but to take them to the address. And then—Porphory's photograph!

I leaped into a car. What a slow procession it was! I was a fool! I would waste half an hour of Nan! I leaped out! Back to the telegraph office. Nan was gone. The next car was even slower. I tortured myself with the certainty that the boy would not wait if I were absent when he arrived.

"Was there a messenger-boy here?" I demanded savagely of Barker.

Barker took his time to answer:

"Nope—not as I saw."

I couldn't ask Mr. Peuter. He would understand. His genius for guessing me was demoniac. Five minutes had passed. Barker compared me to a hen on a hot griddle, and for the second time I told him to shut up. And to do so quickly.

I jerked off my street coat—for no purpose. I did not mean to work. I could not. I meant to have Nan all that beautiful day—if I had to go to her house for her! If I had to be guyed and laughed at! If not, I meant to spend the day in cursing my own stupidity. To let her go when—I was within five feet of her—and she wanting me—I her! I thought no more of Porphory's portrait.

Barker reminded me that messenger-boys did not travel quite like the lightning.

The boy entered—searching in his cap—gazing stupidly about.

"Here!" I shouted, jumping the counter.

The boy looked at me without interest. He had a black suede glove in his hand with the message.

"John Q. Merival?" he asked, as if he were still uncertain!

I snatched the message angrily—happily—from his hand.

"DEAR JOCK,

I am going away with Count Porphory to-day. I thought it best to tell you.

"Forgive—and forget.

"NAN."

LIV

I TOOK THE TEN-FORTY-SIX—AND MY COAT

PRESENTLY I knew that the boy was saying something. And that, with it, he was tendering me the glove.

"The lady forgot her glove."

I dully held it in my hand. The paper I had seen Nan fold and put into her glove dropped to the floor. The boy put it into my hand. It was a railroad time-table. The ten-thirty train was underlined in fresh ink. On the margin were some of Nan's memoranda:

"Tan Gloves.
"Violet Water.
"Salts for Pungent.
"Something to read on the Way.
"Baggage to Waldorf.
"*Kaiser* sails Wed. Hoboken.
"Nine A.M.
"Christopher St. car at 8th and Broadway for ferry."

"No, by God!" I cried.

Mr. Peuter had been so shocked by my profanity that he had dropped his glasses. But, having picked them up uninjured, he came up to me and put his hand on my shoulder in a way to make me adore him.

"Use the telegraph, sir, to stop her!"

He had guessed the whole situation!

"Impossible! *I* must go."

"You have a time-table there, sir. She is going on

the ten-thirty— See ? Perhaps another train follows— a faster one."

Yes ! Immediately below the one Nan had underscored was one which left at ten-forty-six. And it was an express. It passed the ten-thirty at Primrose !

The clock marked ten-thirty-seven.

" And what is this, sir ? "

Mr. Peuter had forcibly taken from the resisting boy the large envelope I had seen Nan address. In the brief glance I could give it, I saw on its face the name of the most important city daily.

" I think, sir, that we would be justified in retaining this," urged Peuter.

I laughed him a hoarse negative. My brain was dealing with the message to me.

" But, sir, I have no doubt that this is a pair of their photographs and an account of the disgraceful affair in advance ! I shall open it."

" No ! " I shouted madly. " It is private ! It is Nan's ! Take it ! Go ! "

I raped it from Peuter, without at all knowing what I was about, and gave it to the boy—fancying only that I was saving something of Nan's from profanation.

" I take the ten-forty-six ! " I cried, plunging to the door.

" Take your coat," grinned Barker, throwing it to me:

LV

THE FAR PLACE WHERE IS INFINITE PEACE

MY first consciousness after the accident—as I knew it later—was of being recalled from some far place where were infinite silence and immense peace.

I was curiously vexed. For now I was vaguely sensible of pain and suffering.

Then I heard whispering at the door. I seemed to recall that this had opened and closed.

Something within leaped. My ears buzzed—cleared—I heard—

Nan's voice!

What had happened? Had I forgotten Nan in the far place? *Was* there a place where one could forget Nan!

But where had I been? How long?

My suffering grew intense. But I was vexed no more that something had brought me from that far place (just beyond which I now knew was beautiful death) to this where were pain and suffering—and Nan.

And was it that little voice which had reached so far and led me so long way with so little erring?

It made me happy to think so.

Now I could hear quite well:

"Brain shock," some one was saying in staccato; "perhaps concussion. Sluggish circulation. Stupid nerves. We shall wake him up now. Start the natural processes, miss. Hopeless? Not at all!"

The door opened and closed, and that voice was gone.

"Has he spoken?"

Nan's voice!

"No."

The nurse—so I guessed.

"Nor moved?"

"No."

"Nor know any one or anything?"

"No. Yet we think that subconsciousness has returned. This will tell. Are you strong enough to make the test?"

All in whispers.

"Yes."

"Do not speak at first. Not at all, if possible. *He* ought not to speak. In five minutes you must go. Now! Take his hand—very gently. Put your lips close to his ear. Whisper, distinctly, his name."

She drooped at my bedside. Her fingers curled gently about mine. I felt her hair against my cheek. I smelled violets. Then—as if from very far:

"Jock!"

I tried to answer, but could not.

"Tell him *your* name," directed the nurse.

"Jock—I am—Nan!"

"Yes," I said, and closed my hand feebly on hers.

Nan sobbed.

The nurse took her away.

"Come! At once! He must not be further excited now. It has succeeded. You may come to-morrow. Tell him you *will* come to-morrow."

"Jock—I will come to-morrow. Do you hear?"

"Yes, to-morrow," I said in syllables.

Nan laid her cheek against mine. It was damp.

I still heard the voices, but further and further off.

And yet I knew that Nan did not go—did not obey the nurse—that her cheek was still damply against mine—that I was glad for her rebellion—the pressure of her cheek!

"You *must* go at once. Don't you see? It was too much. You cannot come again unless you obey."

I heard Nan beg—

"To-morrow? You promised—to-morrow."

"Perhaps. If you go now—at once!"—

"Will you send me word—to-night?"

" Yes. Go, please."

" I want to know how he is."

" Yes."

I supposed now that Nan had gone—been dragged away.

The nurse raised my head and put something to my nose which I was to inhale. I wanted to protest that I was not faint—not a bit. But I failed. The nurse put my head down upon the pillow.

Presently—after a long journey from somewhere, it seemed—something touched my lips.

I waited a long time, wondering. It was a contact—soft—magnetic—exquisite—which reached something still vulnerable within.

But thought did not elucidate it.

I put out my hand. Another hand took it.

" What—was—it ? " I asked.

" She kissed you." It was the nurse who answered.

The nurse kept her fingers on my pulse.

" You will be better now," she said.

Well—I knew that. Nan had come ! I wished the nurse would go. But she spoke again :

" She will come to-morrow ! She will kiss you."

And I knew *that*—hang her !

And then, again, before I was quite gone away to my far place :

" You will get well now."

And that ! Nan had kissed me. What was the use in telling me what I knew ?

Some one came in. It seemed to have been a long while since the last word. Another hand took my pulse. These fingers were hard and cold.

" He will get well ! " It was the brisk voice of the man who had spoken before.

" Yes—she was good for him."

The softer voice of the nurse.

" Hello !—He has gone off again ! "

" Yes," the nurse assented.

" How was it when she came ? "

" She kissed him."

" Ah ! And that—brought him——"

An ellipse.

"Good! She must kiss him every day!"

The voice laughed.

I heard the nurse laugh. I did not hear what she said. But the man's voice followed me whither I had gone.

"Not necessary to insist?"

He laughed, too.

The nurse spoke again.

"Good, good, good!"

With that, the man went, still laughing.

I understood! He was laughing at Nan! I would have it out with him the moment I was well enough—before!

"I'll remember him!" I thought. "And this place!

"It is a hospital. That was the doctor. The other was the nurse. I must have been hurt." There was a long time of vague, wondering, wandering blankness. Then the thread of thought returned—darkly. "When—where? How did Nan know?—Nan—Nan?"

I was broken and mended again.

"It has not been long. Not a year!"

My mind was proud of its infantile reasoning. It clinched itself with an *ergo*.

"For I wouldn't have stayed away from Nan—a *year!*" it triumphed.

Then I fancied that I laughed. That I began to understand quite accurately.

"Why, it must be only a day or two—if Nan wasn't there!" I could think even at the far place!

But I was puzzled for the reason of it all.

The thread of thought would mend no more. My mind was tired, sullen, rebellious. It gave up. That was easy to do. Suddenly I had no curiosity.

At that far place of content, where I had once more arrived, there was no such thing. When one arrived there, that which had mattered before mattered no longer. No one who has not been there—on the fumes of the poppy—on the gossamer thread of the hashish—by the devious winding of a shocked or shattered brain—or a brain worn to its woof—by the agony of sorrow—terror—disappointment—despair—decay—can under-

stand it. But *there* is rest—peace—*sleep*—there only—this side of heaven—which even Nan cannot disturb—for there even Nan is remembered no more. Nothing is there!

And though all this is true, I thank God that there was such a place—I thank God that there is such a place—for such as I. For such as I, God, in His mercy, established it—maintains it.

LVI

THE NEXT DAY WAS TO-MORROW

BEFORE Nan came the next day, memory went to work—but in the poor fashion of a memory which has been shocked nigh to oblivion. I now knew that there had been a brain-stunning catastrophe. I could recall shouting—the horrid clangor of colliding masses of steel—terror and pale faces too. And Nan was there—but I knew not yet how. Save that Nan should be wherever I was.

But my curiosity always staggered and languished at the place of rest, where even Nan could not come. And this I still longed for, when thought became labour and recollection—suffering—when living came insisting—save when Nan was there. Then I suffered—yet was content to remain away from the far place. Nay, I was glad, so deeply was Nan in my unconscious soul.

She came early—as soon as they would let her, she said. A nurse had led her over from the women's department to that of the men, where I was. I knew instantly—even with my bit of working brain—that she was there, though my face was buried in antiseptic bandages. Perhaps it was the *frou* of her skirts—like no other skirts—the little waft of violetted air—perhaps something even more subtle and clairvoyant! It appears that I was not to know that she had been in, unless my knowledge came spontaneously, and that she was to go without revealing her presence. These, I believe, were the terms of her permission to visit me so early—

as soon as her own nerves had been put in order for the day. She was to keep her promise to me. But no more.

I held out my hand. Nan made a little gasp of delighted surprise. She took it. I knew that she knelt at the side of my bed. Presently she put her face down upon it.

"Jock!"

"Nan!"

It was a very ghostly greeting.

"S-sh!" she warned. "You are not to talk. I am not. I promised."

"But *you* were not—hurt?"

Each word took a minute.

"No—you—saved—me—again! S-sh!" said Nan.

Then silence—happy silence! The nurse spoke:

"The five minutes are up. You must go."

"To-morrow," she whispered. "Good-bye!"

"To-morrow!" I whispered back.

She kissed me.

So she came every day—and every day, at leaving, kissed me. At first it was five minutes, then ten, then fifteen—and the kiss always—little more. She told me on the fifth day—I think it was—that *she* was no longer at the hospital, that I was much better, and that they would now permit her to come with less restraint. It seemed that my recovery had not been certain, and her first coming was in the nature of an experiment to aid in re-establishing certain faculties which had, apparently, lapsed. But on all these accounts it had been good for me, it appeared.

Always Nan spoke first when there was speech. For I had become entirely content to know that she was there—quietly—at my bedside—and Nan seemed to be as content as I to be speechless. It seems simple, perhaps, but it was ineffable. Little as it was, it made me care to live again.

* * * * *

"Jock," asked Nan, "do you never care to talk?"

"No, if you will stay," I answered.

This seemed to please her.

"Yes—thank you," Nan said. "It is better that way—for *me*."

I did not then understand this. But I had not sufficient curiosity concerning anything to wish it made plain. And long afterward—weeks—months—Nan herself made it plain.

"Do you know what I think I will do? We *must* talk—soon—you know."

She asked this gaily, yet with an air of anticipating danger.

"No," said I. "What will you do?"

"Tell you the news—every day—like poor Cyrano did to Roxane."

"Yes!"

"Well, then——"

She told me all the gossip of our friends and everything the newspapers contained. But I heard little enough of it—except the voice which spoke it. That had something deeper, sweeter, in it than I had yet heard. I wondered if it was in Nan's face too. This was yet another Nan!

"You said you were not hurt?" I asked again—the only thing my mind asked.

"Nothing but the shock."

"And you have recovered from that?"

"Entirely."

"Your voice——"

"What—what of it?"

"Nothing. It is different."

"Yes," she said, very softly. "It ought to be. It ought to sound worried."

"Nan, don't worry—about me."

"I do not—about you—Jock."

"Who, then?"

"Myself."

"Stop it!" I said, in as nearly her own little imperious way as I could command just then.

"Oh, Jock, that is sweet," she said. "It means that the old Jock is to come back!"

"Why, certainly! You never doubted that, did you? It was nothing."

But I knew not what it was, as yet, nor cared.

"You were very—very ill! You didn't help the doctors to get you well."

"They always say that. It makes the cure so much the more renowned. I am laughing—that is, I am thinking I am—under the bandages. But I don't believe my features interpret me quite accurately just now."

"Oh, Jock! *I* am crying! And the nurse said I dare not! She said if I did I could not come again. Does it hurt you, Jock?"

"Hurt me?" I asked huskily. "My face?"

"That I cry."

"For me?"

"For—myself."

"Better obey the nurse."

"I can't, Jock!" Then she added, "I am too—glad! Don't you see that?"

"Oh! I *hear* it! Cry! And God bless you!"

"Oh, it *is* for *joy*—and sorrow too—all together! If you had been killed before you had a chance to—before I had told you—answered the questions——"

"S-sh!" said I. "Now, no more sorrow, at any rate. I want to hear you laugh—first. That is more important than telling. *I* want the old Nan, too—first."

"Do you, Jock? Then I shall. Not now. As soon as I can. For I am—really, I am more glad than sorry. And—oh, Jock dear—I'm glad to put off the telling. Jock—" it was straining, not very happily, after the old fashion—"you would smile at yourself—if you could see yourself. Such a sight! Nothing but your hair and the tip of your nose can be seen!"

"I *can't* smile—physically."

"Nor frown—at me!"

"Misfortunes have their compensations."

"And, Jock, you cannot imagine the sensation—to be talking to this white mask of bandages! It's something like talking against a white wall—you don't expect an answer. And, then, when one comes you are a little shocked—just as if the wall had spoken

without opening a crack—or changing its beautiful white colour!"

"I hope it will be no worse when the wall opens its crack and changes colour!"

Nan laughed, still striving after the old fashion—gone now, as I knew, for ever!

I wondered that Nan could do this! There was something piteous in it all. Each of us trying to help the other to a kind of lightness which had vanished in the stress of mortal suffering.

LVII

ONE THING WAS A CONVENT—THE OTHER WAS A SEESAW

VERY soon it was not necessary for her step or her voice or the *frou* of her skirts or the touch of her hand to bring me back from my far place. I came back to meet her. And soon I went there no more—even when she left me. For now I listened till she came, then waited till she kissed me—hungered for the morrow! There was pain, too, and suffering and dizzy thought and eating and drinking and the smell of drugs. But these could be borne—with Nan.

There was still little speech—more often none—but when it came it was gay with the little gaiety which tried desperately to be the old fashion but never was, and only lingered on the edge of sorrow which, somehow, we both knew must be met and borne, but which we both shunned—I easily putting it out of my wounded mind when it obtruded—Nan, as I afterward knew—hiding it in hers—but having it always—and then, at the end, the ineffable kiss. And after, the hope and waiting for the morrow.

With eyes to see and lips to speak—with strong hands and a heart full of blood, these things are not great. Perhaps to you they are small. But supine, broken, silent, with the far place of content no longer a refuge, yet with no other—a floating, homeless atom—with only mind enough to yearn for the presence of Nan—but not to reason why—not to understand as once it did—that it must not—from which fine distinctions of conduct were shaken—reduced to the primeval

necessity for comradeship—to such a one a brief whisper—the pressure of a softer cheek than your own, the tracking of a stray hair over your face, a bit of the breath of dead violets in your air, then deep in your nostrils—a pitying sigh—a tear—these are all there is of earth to you then! Is it sentimental?

Try it! Bind your eyes! Set your heart to slow measures. You will hear—whoever you be—the whispering of Nan's skirts long after she has gone—till sleep comes! Perhaps even when you go out to dream! You will not ridicule me. Life is one thing. The death of life—the maiming of it—another!

When the doctors bring you unwilling back from the far place—you will listen for Nan! But you will hate them for it—when she does not come.

Now, when it is all past, it seems to me both strange and infinitely gracious that God should take from us at such times the sense of right and wrong, the fine distinctions of our relations to our fellow-men which are for life and not for one who, for the space he languishes, no longer lives. For why should one who has ceased to be a part of life—of the restless, avid thing we call the world, who only lingers on the way to death—be vexed with its problems!

So all that exquisite sense of rectitude of which I was so conscious in life was gone. It was not needed. For here nothing could be wrong. I had no mind with which to compass wrong—conceive it. I had no members with which to execute it. And, too, Nan's follies, even if I had as carefully remembered as I forgot them, would scarce have vexed me for the brief shadow of a moment. What had I to do with them? Indeed, what had she? Did they make her voice less wondrous? Or her touch less comforting? Or her dear comradeship less exquisite? No. They mattered not. She might have been a wanton. In this time it would not have mattered. She was all I had. She was all I wanted. And, happily, God has so ordained it that in such a time one does not think of what may come when the wounded mind shall mend. But only of what *is*.

So Cawdor was forgotten, imperilled honour was,

and Nan's follies; and only the dear things I have spoken of above remembered.

Have you not been sufficiently ill at some time to bear me witness of this? Have you not some recollection of how an illness clears away the huge mirage of sophistry and leaves you the infinitely smaller citadel of fact, and sometimes gives you the key to this?

So the one fact of consequence to me in this time was Nan. I had come through some immense ordeal, which had left me only her. I did not reason it thus—I could not. It was not necessary. It simply *was*. I only knew that she was there. But it seems to me now that if I had, I should have felt that in some fashion all that had kept Nan from me had been proven unsubstantial and had been consumed in the ordeal and had no more a being. And she had my hand!

Nan told me one day—I did not know how many had passed—that the next day I was to have her for half an hour. That we would celebrate it with two—

She stopped there and let me wonder what she meant.

But it was quite enough that I was to have her for half an hour on that day. I was like a beggar receiving alms. I took what I got thankfully, and either asked for no more or trusted fate that more would follow.

But when the next day came I woke with it in my mind. I asked to have my hair brushed. I wondered whether my bed coverings were immaculate. Whether the smell of drugs was offensive. All this seemed good to the nurse and the doctor. And when I asked to have my nails put in order, and myself arranged the ragged ends of my moustache, and finally disposed myself upon the pillow in what I fancied the careless but effective attitude of a perfectly well man reclining at his ease—the nurse broke down and laughed suddenly!

I ruffled my hair and pulled down the ends of my moustache. I turned my back to her!

"Pardon me," said the nurse over my shoulder, "but all that means that you are doing splendidly. And it makes me—very happy to know it!"

But I did not forgive her, and I would not speak to her. I pretended to sleep—a favourite ruse of mine

when I wanted to be let alone. But I listened for Nan. Nurses, doctors, surgeons, attendants, moved about my bed like ghosts, spoke in whispers and by gestures. They asked me no questions, and I asked them none. But when some new footstep came I would wake from my pretended lethargy.

So I asked before she had quite entered :

" Is—it—Nan ? "

Though I knew, and though I was instantly sorry that I had so disarranged my hair and moustache.

Nan laughed gloriously—then checked it as one does who, loving to laugh, used to laughing, suddenly laughs at a solemn place.

" Jock, how *do* you know ? I came like a mouse ! "

" Nan, did you ever see a cat waiting — for a— mouse ? "

Now she laughed again, and made me very glad.

" Don't come as if there were to be a funeral. There is to be none. The doctors say so. Come just as you used to."

" Like a rushing, mighty wind ? "

" Yes ! "

Nan sobered then.

" It seems as if I never could again, Jock. Something is gone. Hic sepultus."

I was silent.

" And something is come in its place. Something very good—Jock, really good—and—and—quiet ! Can you fancy that, Jock ? "

" No—hanged if I can ! " said I. " What is it ? "

" Don't *you* know—really ? "

" No."

" *I* can't understand it, either. I hoped you would."

" Tell me when you do. I will when I do. I am laughing."

" Yes, I thought I knew. That it was quite simple. But *that* doesn't account for it. Jock, I'm not Nan any more at all."

" Oh ! " said I, with proper disappointment. " Another reincarnation ? They are so numerous. Who, then ? "

" I'm *sister* Somebody. I think I ought to go about with those lovely white phylacteries—is that right?—about my face—like the sisters wear!"

" They'd be mighty becoming!"

" Yes. Wouldn't they, Jock! And a long black stole with a hood! And little cuffs at my wrists."

" They don't wear cuffs. That is a vanity."

" I *will* have the little white cuffs! They'd just suit my hands!"

" You are not regenerated! Vanity still lingers! Take the cuffs!"

I kissed the hands.

' But, Jock, I *do* feel—oh—yes, religious! I *will* feel religious. Say I may, Jock, please! That too!"

" You may—though my authority for creating you a religieuse is somewhat uncertain."

" Why, Jock, circumstance—fate—Satan—whatever it was—has made me so. Oh, you don't know! You never will—until I tell you how I have been bad! And I'll never tell you—if you please. You'd despise me. There are only two things to be done with me now—as soon as you get well."

" What are they?"

I regarded this all as such of the old Nan as was still left. But she had become curiously moved as she went on, and her hand gripped mine.

" One is a convent."

" Cut that out at once. What is the other?"

After a silence:

" No matter."

" But, Nan dear——"

" S-sh! Here is the nurse!"

I heard nothing.

" Let *me* fix your hair and—arrange you."

She did this. I was humiliated sufficiently to wish it quickly over. For while we were talking, forgetting that I could not see how much Nan could see, fancying now and then that she was not looking, I had undertaken, by small touches, to restore all that the nurse's laughter had made me destroy. I never have been—I never can be indifferent to the effect of

my personal appearance upon others—Nan more than any other. Yet I have always been extremely sensitive when this idiosyncrasy of mine—if that it be—is noticed. I was satisfied to remain very quiet while Nan, indeed, "arranged" me. I hope her arrangement was the most effective that could be made. I quite think I needed it at this time.

She told me then, while the nurse remained, how my recovery was now certain. Then, with a little trepidation, that I was to talk as much as I could.

We both laughed a little.

"Besides—if we are both good—" whispered Nan—she seemed still to prefer whispers—"I am to come as often as I am *good* for you—and to stay as long as I am *good* for you—and to kiss you as often as kisses are *good* for you."

"Well, then——" I began happily.

"No," chided Nan. "You see, I am *not* good for you yet. I've stayed too long. I've talked too much. But I've promised—so— One—two!"

She kissed me *twice*—and was gone.

I wondered if the nurse were really there.

But then I drowsed.

And what that other thing might be? And if she had meant two *kisses?*

But then I slept.

About me? And Nan?

But then I dreamed.

And the dream *was* about me and Nan and the other thing. And the other thing was a huge seesaw. I was riding on the one end. Nan was on the other—each alternately at an immense height and a frightful depth. And we were shouting happily to each other. But I was vastly puzzled because we were not in the garments of children—as we manifestly should have been—but in those of maturity. For Nan had on a blue dress with a train the end of which was lost in distance. And I had on a frock-coat, the tails of which flowed quite beyond my sight. I tried to draw these up. And Nan, seeing what I was doing, tried to do the same with her train. But neither of us ever got to

the end. We laughed on and piled up hillocks of her dress and my coat. And we very nearly upset the tea-table which I now for the first time discovered titillating between us. Nan laughed over at me. I laughed back at her. With an arm many miles in length, Nan undertook to put a cube of sugar into my cup—who took no sugar. I seized her hand with another which travelled mightily to reach it. When I opened it a kiss lay there—two! Nan laughed over to me, and said, by pantomime, that they were for my mouth. I understood and placed them there. Now can you fancy what was the form in which Nan's kisses were materialized? I wish I could. Yet I am sure that I *saw* them there in the palm of my hand.

LVIII

A VERY LONG WORD: PRES-TI-DIG-I-TA-TEUR

THIS marked the period of my established convalescence.

"Nurse," said I, belligerently, "why haven't I been permitted to talk?"

"You have been—for a long time. It was only the first week that you were restricted. You have not been prohibited since the second day of your consciousness."

I did not understand that. Nan had said—

Just then Nan arrived.

The nurse laughed and told her I was doing very well—that I had, in fact, been finding fault with her, which was a good sign. She explained what it had been about.

I let her begin. I meant her to understand that I had little to say. But—I think I trembled. It was an epoch! When one is ill one does that, I suppose—makes epochs of little happenings. My curiosity concerning the accident was become more active, too. And on this day, as I supposed, I should learn something about it. Besides, recollection had been working with recollection's automatic persistence, and it had shown me some dark, vague pictures which I was only too glad to consign to the limbo of the wild imaginings which had never been. But they would not stay there. They came back.

The nurse seemed to go then. Nan took her usual place at the side of my bed.

"Nan! Talk!" I greeted, robustly.

"Yes," said Nan, "if *you* promise not to."

"But, Nan! I'm to talk as much as I can! The nurse says I might have been talking for weeks!"

"Jock, I'm afraid to let you talk! It was I, not the nurse, wouldn't let you."

"Afraid! You're attainted of treason!"

"I've been afraid all the time. Haven't you noticed how *I* have talked, talked, talked! And kept you from it—even when the nurse didn't say so!"

"I said I hadn't."

"But I have!"

"Well, you've got to pay for it now! I am going to unload an inquiring mind. Look out! Clear the track! Henceforth I am of the acquisitive, inquisitive world and its problems. I lost a lot while I wasn't. Now I shall catch up."

"Jock," said Nan, rather breathlessly, "before you begin I'd better confess, or you'll think I was forced to. Jock—I was afraid you'd ask—the questions."

"Oh! Then I won't ask any. That's the way, I suppose, to disappoint a woman and make her anxious to answer!"

"It does not make me anxious, Jock dear. But," —tremulously—"go on. The time has come. I have tried to be ready. And I—I—think I am. Ask."

"What was the 'other thing'?"

Nan said, with relief:

"Jock, that is *not* the questions."

"No? Then let us dispose of that one first. To my half of a brain that is the only one that seems to matter just now. One was a convent. What was the other?"

"It is only one word."

"Well—that's easy!"

"No, Jock dear, it is very hard. Must I answer?"

"Why, Nan, dear! It must be a very long word—like pres-ti-dig-i-ta-teur!"

We both laughed. This was a stumbling-block of Nan's childhood which she had never mastered.

"No, it is but one syllable. It is very familiar to both of us."

"Why, Nan dear," I joyed, "you are making a dictionary out of one syllable! Out with it. It can have but little meaning if it is but one syllable! Here goes!"

"One was—yes—the convent——" Nan went on, slowly; "the other—was——"

"Yes!" as she paused.

"*You.*"

For a moment my little, inept mind, congested by a flood of joy, was disabled. Then it slowly filtered into my soul.

"Now—ask the questions!"

"No! I won't spoil it! The sound of my voice would do that!"

"God bless you—for the reprieve!" said Nan.

We were silent.

LIX

HOW GOD WAS GOOD TO NAN

WHEN the nurse came to warn Nan that she must go, we did not change our places. Perhaps she understood.

"In a few minutes, nurse dear," begged Nan; and the nurse let us alone.

"Jock," Nan went on in haste, "there *are* things I must say before I go—*now*—while I can—while you can forgive me. Before you find out yourself. The other questions—questions—now—that you will ask are—Cawdor? Honour?—for you must know that I would keep that. Why was I hurt? How? Who is to blame? When these questions are answered, do with me as you will. But let the answer wait until your head is better able to understand and judge me. And perhaps, Jock, I am selfish enough to want for a little—little while—to have the happiness I have fought for—do you hear?—*fought for!* Will you be content to not know until you are better able to understand? Can you wait a little to ask?"

"All my life, Nan, if it is to be *such* waiting!"

Nan caught upon this.

"Could you? Could you take me on trust? All—all—all my life? Suppose there were a sealed envelope containing my transgressions, to be opened only after my death? Could you wait? Would you not open it before?"

"No," said I.

"Jock, that is what I am afraid of. That if I tell

you how I won the fight for *us*—if it is won, and I won't know till you are well—better—you will think and think of it, and every time I am the least bit strange you will wonder. And after a while you will not wonder, but be certain. And that is mistrust. Then we should both be miserable. For what one *does* even God cannot undo. The sinner repents, but his sin remains for ever and ever. It is *that* I see now. Jock, I am yours—when you want me—when the questions have been answered. No—no—no! Not now. It will be all right. You will not lose me. No one else wants me now. Only after the questions—you will ask— But you must tell me when you begin to remember—all of it—I must tell you—I must answer the questions before that—or you will not believe me—yes——"

"Nan dear, I will never ask the questions!"

"You must," cried Nan, "when the time comes. If you do not, I must answer them without an asking. My happiness depends upon it. I hope yours does. You must! Otherwise I will not know whether I have won!"

"What—Nan? 'Fighting'—'winning'—seem such strange words for you! Won what?"

"You for *me*—me for *you!*"

I reflected a moment with a vague and dizzy joy.

"You are not well yet, Jock. You are not yet able to understand it all——"

"No," I admitted chaotically, "but I can understand this—if you will say yes—or—no. Do you mean that all those things which kept us apart—are gone?"

"Yes."

I was a long time silent.

"Do you understand?" Nan asked.

"Yes," I said—and did not. It was too great. "And are Cawdor and Aunt Izzy—satisfied?"

"Yes."

I could think of no more particulars, so I asked, childishly:

"And the whole world?"

"Yes."

Then Nan asked:

"Are you?"

It seemed only a matter, then, of saying yes, quite simply, which I did. Perhaps, as my shattered mind possessed itself of this, something more emotional might have followed. But suddenly I thought of that fetish Nan had accused me of worshipping.

"But, Nan, my honour?"

"Is safe."

"But who? How? That I cannot understand. Did *you* save it?"

"Yes."

"I should have said 'our' honour."

"No—you should not. Mine is not—safe."

Presently—before I could interpose my evident question:

"That is enough, please, Jock dear, for to-day. I am glad for your tolerance. I thought you would perhaps wake up with an acute recollection of everything—and misunderstand. I did not dream that you might not. I was prepared for the worst. There seemed no best. But I soon saw how good God had been to me. He ordained that you should not remember—not understand—till you knew how sweet I meant to be to you—now—for ever and ever! Till I could tell you that I was yours—whenever you cared to have me. Now, let us wait till your full reason returns—we will need it—and then if you want me—if you ask me—in the full light of reason—understanding everything—oh, God!"

Suddenly Nan sobbed in a tempestuous fashion. I tried with a sick man's ineptitude to comfort her. But she sobbed on.

"Oh, let me, Jock, let me! It is good—for—me! They are tears of relief. You cannot fancy how I have sinned—what I have endured. To think that you might hate me—despise me—to go through all the horror of that! Then to suddenly find that you were only sweet and good to me. What I did, I meant for the best. It happened as I had planned it all. Yes! But, then—what one never thinks of—

more happened than I had planned. And that is the trouble. *I* was hurt more. *You* were. The world would not understand. God grant that you may.

"Why, Jock, I thought you'd *hate* me—drive me out of your presence—the moment your reason—consciousness, I mean—returned. How sweet—sweet—sweet you *are*, Jock dear! That *is* why I am crying. God has been very good to not let you remember till I could be so sweet to you that you could not doubt what I wished for both you and me. I have kept up by remembering Raffaellita. If it had not been for that—Jock, you must let me go! I am breaking down!"

She swooped madly upon my face, and rushed away.

I lay thinking till sleep came, curiously careless of what Nan might have done, smiling a little at the fervour of her declaration that she had sinned. Nan could not sin—Nan was mine!

LX

THE NURSE THOUGHT I WAS RAVING

THE nurse woke me from my doze to say that she had a letter marked "Important."

"Would you like to have it read to you?" she asked.

"Let me see it," I said.

"I must not move the bandages," said the nurse.

"I didn't mean that. Let me *have* it."

"Oh!"

The nurse gave it to me.

From Nan, of course! If there had been nothing else to tell me—there were the violets! Like any other violets, say you? Not at all! Like Nan's violets!

"Thank you," I said. "I think I'll keep it till my cous—till Miss Merival comes. Anyhow, I'm very sleepy."

I put the letter carelessly under my pillow, and turned to feign sleep—so that the nurse would go. She—understanding, I think—went. I brought out the letter. Now, what in the deuce could Nan have wished to write to me? When she sees me every day! I'll make her read it to me herself!

I laughed.

Nan came gaily.

I waved the letter at her.

"Read it!" I cried.

I felt her stop. I knew she was terrified. She did not approach nor touch the letter. Presently:

"I had forgotten that! I thought, somehow, that you had got it—knew that—*that* much."

"Well, hurry and refresh *your* recollection—then mine!"

"It is an *old* letter, Jock. Written the day of—the—the accident."

"The day of the accident?" What had Nan to do with the accident?

Now I was a little disturbed myself.

"Jock, it was meant for you to see—under certain circumstances. Under certain other circumstances, it was meant for you not to see. In the one case I would be near you. In the other, I would not be. Then I meant to ask you by telegraph to not read the letter—but to destroy it. I knew you would."

"Which of the circumstances has happened?" I asked.

Nan hesitated a long time, then said:

"Neither."

"Then it is as if the letter had not been written. Take it."

I held it out to her.

Nan came and drooped beside me. She did not take the letter from my outstretched hand, but, instead, drew down my arm and pillowed her head tiredly upon it.

"Jock," she asked presently, "if the circumstances had happened upon which I was to ask you for the return of the letter, would you have given it to me?"

"Certainly," said I.

"Without a question? Now or hereafter?"

"Without a question!" I tried to laugh. "You seem to think that difficult!"

"It is difficult! You *would* be taking me on trust! I would not do it—if I were you."

"I shall be glad to take you on trust," I said; "to take you, in fact, anyhow! As soon as you let me."

"I wonder if you mean all that?"

"Take your letter! I'll prove it."

Nan recoiled.

"No! I will not touch it! It is done! It was the——"

"Well, then, light the gas! Make a holocaust!"

But now Nan withheld me strenuously.

"No! Much more no than the other! Keep that, Jock—never destroy it! It contains the real Nan! One which even you did not know! Strange that I should think you *did!* And some day, when you will no longer take me on trust, when you want, to know me—down into the remotest depths of my soul—open that letter! Till then you take me on trust! It answers the questions! All! It may be my only acquittance some day."

"Hanged if I do! Burn it—burn it—burn it! That is the way of witchery—sorcery—all enchantment! You've made a Pandora's box of it! I won't have it! Good heavens! think of the sleep I shall lose guessing, guessing, guessing! And it's hard to guess just now! I'll go about with it on my soul like old Binsad the Sailor—according to the gospel of Nan! Say when I am to open it, and we'll make a feast when the time comes—and open it!"

"*You* are to open it any time you like, dear Jock—any time you want to know the real Nan. Now! Never! As long as you do not, you are taking me on trust. When you do, you may not want to take me at all. If you have taken me, you will want to put me away—or—else—you will adore me! No—no—no! Do not speak: How can you while you don't know what is inside that half-transparent envelope!"

Then she tempted me by saying:

"Jock, I can read a little of it from the outside! I wonder whether you will when you can?"

"I will not," laughed I. "Nan, I have not the least curiosity about it."

"Jock, one thing more. It *is* the letter of my transgressions. It *is* marked—in fancy—to be opened only after my death. But you are to open it whenever you want to know the real Nan—whenever you can no longer take me on trust. For, Jock, that will be the death of me, perhaps—perhaps the life of me!"

"I'll never open it! Take it! I know the real Nan."

I thought I heard the door close—very softly.

"Nan!"

I reached out for her:

"Nan!"

I flung my arms wildly about.

Then I rose in bed and called again:

"Nan—Nan—Nan!"

Some one entered.

"Nan," I begged, "do you think there is a thing—a thing in all the world which could make any difference now! Nan, I love you! Do you hear? I don't care what is in the letter! I don't care what you have done! I love you——"

The nurse caught my begging hands, and put me back upon the pillow without a word.

"She is gone. Try to be quiet—very quiet now," she said, after she had composed me.

I satisfied her utterly in that. I lay like a stone. I think it must have been an hour:

Then she said again:

"Shall I read the letter for you?"

"No," I answered, hiding it furtively under my pillow.

She did not go. She thought I had been raving!

Take Nan on trust! Since she had forbidden me to destroy the letter I would keep it, and on the day of our marriage I would hand it to her and beg her to destroy it. Until then nothing should be said about it.

Still, I was glad she had not heard what the nurse fancied my raving!

Or no! I would somehow put it out of my power to read it. And in the end I would show Nan that I could trust her—and take her so. I must put it where later, if need be, it would prove its own custody and whereabouts Or no! I would simply lose it! And that night I couldn't sleep for a long time! I was forming what my reconstructing mind hailed as a very cunning plan! I might not destroy the letter. But

I must get rid of it. Temptation might come. There was none now—not an atom! I cared nothing for the contents of that letter. But some day I might be tempted to open and read it. When I could half see through the paper. Well, then? No matter what under heaven that letter contained, Nan was mine. She could not be more mine. Just now I did not in the least care how that had been brought about. I supposed that some process of my brain sensitive to the sort of thing which had kept my love locked up in my heart was dulled, perhaps slain. I almost hoped it might be the latter.

This was the plan my little brain brought forth that night with immense travail: I would send the letter addressed to some entirely fictitious address. The person, of course, would not be found. The letter would go to the Dead Letter Office.

Early the next morning I accomplished this with important secrecy.

The nurse brought me a larger envelope, in which, when she went away again, I surreptitiously inclosed Nan's letter. Then I got her to address it to one

Edward Brownlee Fyke,
Twelve Rivers,
Fulton County,
Pa.

This she duly mailed.

Of course there could not possibly be such a person as Edward Brownlee Fyke, nor such a place as Twelve Rivers, and I was not sure there was such a county in Pennsylvania.

LXI

I HAD SIDE-WHISKERS IN 1870

WHEN Nan came again she was quite shy—until I drew her to her old place at my bedside. Immediately she laughed.

"I came in fear and trembling."

"Why?"

"The letter."

"The letter?" repeated I, mysteriously.

"Jock," she said, "has it done its worst? Stop teasing."

"Yes," I laughed, with a caress of her hand.

"Oh, what a lovely worst! Jock, I didn't mean you to read it—now. I hoped you wouldn't. I was afraid. Yet I couldn't ask you to *not*, because—because of what was in it in case you might. I was afraid, afraid, afraid! I thought I wouldn't like you to read it. I *wanted* you to refuse, and take me on trust. But—now—I'm glad you read it. Somehow, I thought—I was so crazy then—you knew. Now we understand. There is nothing to be afraid of any more. Oh, Jock, you don't know how good it is to feel free! To have everything off your soul! Now we can answer the questions, talk of everything—at our leisure. It is not as important as it was——"

"Nan," I laughed, "I'm glad for these bandages on my face."

"Jock!" chided Nan.

"Well—you see, the masks were stripped right off our souls that day. And—and, it's much better that you can't see my face, or I yours."

"But why, Jock?" questioned Nan.

"Why? We can say things! I can be a villain! Forget Cawdor! Honour! Remember only you!"

"Oh! Does that matter to you—now?"

"Doesn't it to you?"

"No. It is all washed away. Honour is satisfied. Cawdor is——"

"Would you say all the sweet things you say to me now—face to face?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll have them off! I want to *see* them!"

"No," said Nan. "Then you wouldn't say any to me!"

"I'm as full of them as you are!"

"Yes. But you still remember Cawdor! Jock, there is no need!"

It *was* fortunate that I at least was effaced by the antiseptic bandages. Here had been, somehow, an almost mechanically contrived new adjustment, which I had not yet entirely assimilated. I felt free to take any attitude towards Nan which she would permit. Cawdor *was* out of the question—somehow. Ah! one can say things in the darkness—dream dreams—see visions—hope—despair—which are impossible in the light of day. So with my face hidden, my eyes closed, and only our voices and hands to speak with, Nan said things to me—splendid—brave—intimate things! And I answered them in kind. As if it were all understood now! And as if Cawdor was not.

"Jock!"

And an imperious, delicious, touch on the arm. Nan had all the time been speaking! I turned toward her.

"Just as if you could see me, dear old Jock! Oh, I wish you could! It's horribly funny!—*now*, isn't it?"

"What?"

"Jock, you don't mean to say that you haven't heard a thing I have read you! I'm *answering!*"

I hadn't, and I confessed it.

"Well! I shall stop the Cyrano business! Close

my budget until your curiosity revives! I'm not afraid now."

I begged her to read on. But she refused, and told me what it had been.

"First, a portrait of you! I wish you could see it. They must have had it a long time. It is much worn, Jock—you have side-whiskers! And you are artistically posed. The fashions are those of 1870! Nevertheless, it calls you a hero. It is their revenge, I suppose. I refused to send them *your* picture—or to 'talk.' I don't think it's you at all, Jock."

"What do they call you?" I laughed. My curiosity began to be a little more militant. But it was still extremely languid. I seemed to understand that I would learn in good time all there was to know. And I cared little enough to hasten the time—or, indeed, to know at all. I had Nan. Nothing could give her to me more.

Yet I had certain dim recollections which came and went without my will—and almost without my care.

Porphory was there—and not the innocuous, velvet-footed Porphory, but a sinister one, tigerish, preying—as if he had somehow, as well as Nan and myself, been unmasked by the accident. And this—the accident—had formed somewhat more clearly in my mind. It was a matter of colliding trains.

"Are you gone off to the far place again?" chided Nan.

"I am here—here—here! Go on! I have ears only for your budget."

We laughed together—I adoringly, Nan joyously.

"Then, here are also lovely portraits of me and Count Porphory," Nan was going on. "Quite up to date—thank heaven—if there is anything to thank heaven for."

I would have leaped out of the bed had I been able.

"You and Porphory! Good God! How did *they* get them? And why?"

"The ones I sent. Don't you know?"

It flashed upon me that that must be in the letter

which I had not read. Then, in another flash, I saw the telegraph office! Did I understand? No—not yet. I must let her go on.

"Yes, I remember," I answered hoarsely. "Now—what is it they call you? You said, 'Names.'"

Nan did not hasten to answer. Instead, she seemed embarrassed.

"Names, Jock. Why are you—so—strange?"

"Names! Go on—on!"

"It was right to call *me* names. None of them are too hard. But some of the things are not true. You know that yourself, Jock dear?"

With such pretty pleading that I said I did, though I knew nothing.

"Yes, Jock, the moment you had saved me I *did* run away from you—yes, *that* is true. But I did *not* run away 'from both hurt and scandal and leave them for you—hoping to hide myself by anon-y-mi-ty,' Jock! What a word! But it is here—on the first page. I've saved all the papers, and when you get well——"

"Nan," said I, "for heaven's sake go *on!*"

"Oh, well, then—' She hid her face as she ran, hoping to escape unrecognized. But our reporter, having the clue from Miss Merival herself, foiled her purpose. He had followed Merival's special, which was chasing the elopers, with another.' Well—it goes on to say that I left you unconscious on the track where I knew that you must be killed, and endeavoured to induce the count to continue, but that he, shocked by my cruelty to you, refused. That, in fact, he then and there abandoned me. Jock—Porphory abandon—*me!* Your Nan! I could laugh at that if you had not been hurt! The vile wretch! I hate him now! You could—couldn't you—laugh? You remember *that* part, don't you?"

"Yes," I said; "go on." I tried to laugh. "See! I do. Go on!"

"It says that if I had pulled you off the track you would not have been so badly crushed. That is true too, Jock dear. But they didn't know one little,

little thing! *You* didn't. You don't now, Jock dear. That is why I am telling you. The letter does not. This is afterward, that was before. That is why I am defending myself a little—the little that is possible."

"What is the little thing?" I hastened, with parching lips.

"That I was crazy. Oh, Jock—dear, dear Jock! I didn't know! I didn't know! I didn't know what I was doing. I only knew when I opened my eyes in the hospital."

I could only answer by silence the astounding revelation, of which I recalled nothing!

"Jock, don't you believe that I was crazy? Do you think I would have run away, and left you to be killed? You! Do you think I could have done that in my very own senses? I? Answer me, Jock!"

"No," I said. "Please go on!"

"Jock, you *know* that I am not a coward. You know that I would have died for you—with you—rather than have deserted you—if I had been myself. But, think! At one moment my heart was bursting with joy! The next—you were lying dead—crushed before my eyes. And I—I—I—had done it! I! Do you hear? Do you wonder that I was struck mad in an instant! I had planned every little move—every little minute had its part to accomplish! And it was all fulfilled! You came as I had planned. I knew that you loved me as I had planned. I knew that you would forgive me as I had planned. I knew that you would take me as I had planned. But a little moment separated me from the—oh, the paradise I had created. The instant passed like that!"

Nan smote her hands together. Then she repeated herself hoarsely:

"The instant passed. At its end I had reached—not paradise, but hell!"

Another moment, while our emotions throbbed like the heat of the summer air.

"Do you wonder that I was crazy, Jock! that moment has brought the gray into my hair! It has

branded its mark upon my face. It has washed folly from my soul! I am an old woman. You wanted to save me. Well—dreadful as it is to say it—you could not have done so. It was here—here—here!" I heard her beat her breast: "I was born to be daring: Free. I longed for it, yearned for it—I was proud of it—bragged of it—though, God knows, innocently enough: I saw no harm in it. I—it—hurt no one—not even me: If I could have had you always, as in childhood, it would not have been so. You satisfied me—made me content: But slowly, slowly, as I knew that I was not to have you, grew hunger and impatience for what you, and you alone, could not give. There was but one quietus for this—constant movement—constant adventure—constant forgetting that which would not, could not be forgotten—save for those moments of morbid action—daring. For always, when they were gone, it came back: Sometimes I think now, dear, dear Jock, but for your coming I *would* have drifted into wickedness. But then I saw no harm in it all. And—then—you came back to me! Once more I was content. Oh, your dear comradeship was the sweetest thing God had ever given me! Yes, I was content—until I began to yearn, yearn, yearn for even more than I had had when we were children! And when I understood that you also yearned for that relationship with me which God himself has enjoined, I was less content than I had been before you came. Now it seems to me that for the last few months of our comradeship I was crazy always. I couldn't have you—you couldn't have me. You had made the Poor Things and all that impossible—not because you had forbidden them, but because you were of marble, they of clay—mud—after you. So you had taken everything and given nothing. I had given everything and received nothing: I was alone: You were alone. We seemed destined to so continue.

"Well, my madness had this good in it. I determined that it should not be.

"Then came that instant which has brought me gray hairs—and a changed face and soul. In that flash of time I was taught that nothing evil can ever be innocent:

That it *must* hurt some one. That I had hurt not only your soul, but your splendid body—killed it. And that the poor guerdon was that *I* was saved! I! Do you wonder that I was crazy?

"You who had lived to make the world better—to champion such as Raffaellita—had been destroyed. I, who had never benefited one human being in all my life, was saved!

"Do you wonder that I was crazy?"

LXII

NAN WAS MAD—RECKLESS—CRAZY

I COULD trust my voice no more. I answered with my hands. God, how good it was that my face was covered now! Now, when recollection came with mighty gushes! A word here, a word there, from Nan had unlocked the vast sluices of remembrance which the accident had dammed. I got back by leaps leviathan to where recollection joined recollection without a break.

How fortunate it was, I thought again, that at the outset of this new—this almost mechanically contrived readjustment—that one of us was physically effaced by the antiseptic bandages! One can also suffer, endure things, with the face hidden which would be impossible otherwise. I hoped, in an instant of madness, that by the time I must show my face—and concern my soul with the things which concerned it *now*—it would be as expressionless as the bandages made it—yes, and as kind to Nan! I thanked God that if it must be hurt—wounded—mutilated—bandaged—it was *now!* I thanked God that Nan could not see what it could not have concealed but for the bandages!

"Jock," Nan was begging, "have you forgiven me?"

Still I could not trust my voice.

"Think how I have suffered!"

Another silence.

"Still—if you have not forgiven me—if you cannot——"

"I forgive you—with all my heart!" I said.

"Oh, I knew it! Because you are—Jock. Oh, Jock! *You* would forgive me if I had hurt you myself!

With my own hands! Some of what they say is true. But I couldn't *help* it! Jock—Jock—Jock! I am only a woman!"

"Thank God for it! And not another word about it!"

For a while we were silent. Then Nan said:

"Thank you, Jock. They all wanted your picture—the newspapers. I said, '*No!*'"

"Before or after?"

"Before."

She said this with nothing of my own damned pretence of lightness.

"I suppose the one after would not be very pretty, judging from——"

I felt her suddenly slip to the floor.

"Don't, Jock! For God's sake, don't! Folly is dead. Let us bury it."

"Yes," I said, finding her hand.

"Do you want to hear the rest, Jock?"

"No. It is not necessary. I remember."

"All, Jock?"

"All."

"Every little thing? Before and after?"

"Yes."

"But, Jock," she cried, in sudden alarm, "the reason? Do you understand that?"

"Perfectly."

"How long is it that you have understood—the reason?"

"Oh—from the first!"

"No—no—no, Jock! You were sweet to me! Then you did *not* understand! I see it all! Now you do—and you are strange—notwithstanding the letter—strange!" Nan shivered against me a little.

"Forgive me."

"Yes! But I must—I *must*—speak! Defend!"

She repeated herself with a certain wildness.

"Yes, if you like. But you are not to feel——"

"That I am responsible? Yes—yes—yes! I *want* to be! I want to feel that it was *for* me—for *me!* Oh—and *by* me! Do you hear? I want to know—oh,

every day—that your beautiful face is no longer beautiful—for *me*—for me! That because of a mad, reckless, wicked— Oh, you had to follow me! To get me back! I made it so! That was my plan! To save me! And I did not think, when I led you into it, how *much* you would save me: How *much* you would be hurt: Jock, I was *not* going away with him: Must I—Nan—tell you *that?* Oh, Jock, not for one moment! Him! I wanted you! I *knew* that you would follow and save me! Yes! I was not afraid: Oh, I *was* mad—reckless—crazy—after that day— You remember? In my lair? Oh—oh—oh!" She shivered piteously.

"I remember," I said.

"I wished to die. If there had been some way! But— Perhaps I wasn't brave enough. And then I should have been in one world and you in another! Oh, we need not keep the mask on now! Jock, need we?"

"No."

"Oh—oh—oh! To make such a sacrifice! Of *you! I!* To hurt *you!* You, who had never hurt me—nor a living thing! You, who had done me only good—yes, good for evil! Jock, do you understand? Try to—understand!"

"I understand."

"I *had* to see you—have you—keep you! I had—I had—I *had!* And I knew you would come! I said it to myself—all the way! You would come! You would take me! You would never let me go!

"I had written you the letter. At least you would understand. You could not misunderstand: Afterward—no matter what happened. Oh, thank God that I wrote the letter!

"All the way! We had not been gone a half-hour when I said to myself, 'Now Jock is on the road—saving me!' I was going straight back with you—you, Jock! Oh, Jock—Jock—Jock! How I exulted! Oh, I saw your face—do you remember that? the moment your train stopped. You saw *me!* I called to you! Jock—Jock—*Jock!* I could see that you heard me! I saw you leap from your train to mine!

Not minding where you were going! I ran toward you! I laughed! I shouted for joy! Then the sudden stopping—the shriek of the whistle—the brakes—the grinding of wheels—the yells of men! Killed—killed—killed! That is what they said. And I knew it was you! I saw you, Jock! Just a moment! Your face was covered with blood. Your hand—this one—this one—which I kiss—kiss—kiss!—lay out as white—white! But there was blood! Then the cars went over you—*over* you! Oh, I became crazy and ran—ran away from you—everything! The ruin I had made! Oh, Jock! If I had something good to offer you! My own dishonoured life? Yes! But what is that! Do you think I would offer that—now? Do you think I would try to make you take it—now? And, oh, Jock dear, you haven't asked for it. You haven't asked me to be your *wife*. You only like me to be near. I am only a companion so far. I have only put myself where you can take me—when you like. I thought that when your mind, your reason came back you might ask me—after you had read the letter and knew—and after I had been very sweet to you— But I am satisfied to wait, Jock, until you are quite, quite well—and then—if you do not ask—why—I—I must—go!

"All the world believes that I was going—going away with *him*—perhaps even Jock—after the letter—even the letter. Jock, if you *would* take me—as a—servant— As a crutch! As something that is of *use* to you. Cawdor will not want me now—and once you wanted me. At first they thought you might be blind. Oh, I almost wished you would be. For then you couldn't see the ruin I had wrought! And I could walk with you! Lead you about. Talk to you! Give my eyes for yours! Keep my hand in yours! But you are not going to be blind. Your eyes are not hurt at all. And—and—oh, Jock—you will *see* what I have done! See it every day. And every day you will hate me more!"

"Hate you—more?"

"Yes."

"How do you spell hate?"

"H-a-t-e."

"Wrong."

"How do you spell it?"

"Not now," I begged.

"I will wait."

"Yes."

"And—while I wait you shall have my dishonoured life to——"

LXIII

GORDON EYRE DODGED INTO A WOMAN'S STORE

"OH, not dishonoured, Nan!" I temporized.

"Not dishonoured! I am dishonoured! Do not misunderstand that. But, oh, my Jock! I had no idea what it was—dishonour! I thought it a little thing about which I could laugh—and the world too—and forget—like my pranks. But, Jock, don't you understand? The world has closed its doors upon me! The whole world! I am alone. People pass me on the street and look the other way if they are kind. If they are nasty, they stare offensively at me. If they do not know what to do, they turn and go the other way—blocks out of their direction—to avoid me. Nobody is at home to me. Gordon Eyre saw me yesterday when I was half a block away, and dodged into a woman's store! I wish the men were all Gordon Eyres. But there are other animals who leer at me as I pass, and, when I am by, and not far enough to not hear, they say—things! Oh, such things! There's some Latin for it: Scandalum magnatum."

Nan tried to abandon the tragic note, and laughed.

"Jock—I am alone—but for you!"

"Then," said I, with such lightness as I could command, "you shall not be alone. I'll be the lot of them—as I was of the Poor Things. And when I get well *I* will take you with me into this same world, and as the world treats you, so shall we treat the world. And I fancy that will be enough of a surprise to the world to make it stop and think—and then, I imagine, further,

that the world will understand that it made a mistake —and will come and grovel at our feet. Then, whether we shall spurn it or not is the only question."

"Jock," said Nan, in a savage, intense whisper, "we'll spurn it!"

Ah, Nan was hurt by the world's attitude! We all think, at times, that this cannot happen to us. No one had been more sure of it than Nan. But the world simply took her at her word—nay, at a little more than her word.

This is the logic of the world which one must try to remember. It never sees the best, but the worst. In an elopement it sees an intention to elope.

This I said to Nan, as gently as I could.

"Yes," she sighed. "No one but you knows the truth. No one will believe—but you—you, Jock! Jock, you do—you do believe—understand?"

"I *know*."

"Yet—you came after me? Just as if you believed —what all the rest of the world did?"

"Just as I had been doing for months! Just as I always did when you needed me. Just as I always will, dear Cousin Nan!"

Nan repeated me fearsomely:

"'Cousin Nan'!"

Then she suddenly laughed.

"Yes, yes! Of course! I'm your cousin Nan. But—I thought we gave that up—that day—in the park——"

She laughed again.

"I—I forget—you know—that—that—yes—we are very happy together—Jock dear, but that I am really nothing more than your cousin Nan—as yet!"

She ended with a rather disagreeable note of harshness.

"And only second cousins at that!"

Fancy the turmoil of my thoughts—and then understand why I could answer nothing.

"Jock—of one thing you *must* be sure at least: I am saved! Now! Are you sure of that?"

"I know it—*now*."

"Did you not before?"

"It was an awkward phrase. It simply repeated yours. Forget it—forgive it."

"No—help me to understand it! Oh, you never *could* have thought such things of me before! Now! Yes. But before, Jock!"

"Nan dear, you have more to forgive than you think. No, I did not think 'such things' before—no—until I got your telegram. Then—alas!—you must have the truth—then all that the world had said of you at once—with a horrid retrospection which made it all lurid—seemed possible in that one moment, as in that other in Little Italy. I fancied that from the first you had deceived me, lied to me—that you had deliberately used me to aid your deception—that you had led me on to love you—had pretended an affection for me—only to cloak the rest. Oh, it seemed odiously cunning. To lie and to deceive was not the worst then. But to use *me* in that fashion! And, a thousand times worse—to use yourself in that fashion! You, my dainty, immaculate Nan! All in the first moment of my passionate discovery. You know what my first moments are like. Yet, even when we think evil possible, we give a woman—such a woman as you—the benefit of the doubt until temptation has come and been vanquished—or——"

"Not vanquished," whispered Nan. "And she is guilty or innocent according to that."

"She *appears* guilty or innocent according to that."

"And I appeared—guilty."

"No. I *knew* that you would vanquish the temptation!"

There was a long silence. Nan slipped down beside my bed.

"Oh, Jock," she whispered, "my dear comrade Jock! Thank you—thank God for your trust and faith in me—though they were not needed—though they were not needed. Yet—even you did not know that before! I wish you had. I wish you had had no need to trust me. I wish you had not had those thoughts of me. I wish you had never had. Thank you, dear, dear Jock! You believe *now*—yes, I know. You are the only one who does."

"Well, the whole world shall!"

"Thank you, Jock. Do not think me ungrateful, but—honestly—I do not care—now!"

"Nan, you must."

"No. I only want you to know that I am saved——"

"But why do you not care?"

"Because you called me 'Cousin Nan.' Hush! Hush!—Jock, the count has boasted—he adopted that horrid lie of the newspaper—and he has said vile things: Cousin—Jock—make him stop!"

Something I had thought slain in the terrors Nan had just revealed lived—flashed—burned and stung upon the instant. The pride of honour! The deep damnation of a stain upon one's escutcheon! This damned cat-treading count to use the name of Nan in public! Chastisement must follow—quick and deadly!

But then, suddenly, I knew that I must not do this! It would but clinch the matter. The world would laugh! This one little speech of Nan's had done more than all the rest to fill the measure of my horror of the thing.

Porphory going about the world and boasting of an amour with Nan! I chained to my bed! There was but one way. To prevent the world from laughing, it must be shocked with horror. That is the world's way—another of its ways. I must kill Porphory. I there dedicated myself to that emprise.

"He shall hear from me the moment I can reach his garret! You are a Merival! You are my cousin—my blood is yours!"

"Your—*cousin!*" gasped Nan again, with a deep breath. Then, very suddenly, as if to forestall me, "Yes—your cousin! But it seems shocking to be called that—now. I wonder why?"

Suddenly she said: "My God!"

LXIV

NAN DID NOT MEAN TO BE AN OUTCAST TO ME

I KNEW that it was not my speech so much as my attitude of retreat, evidenced in the one word, which hurt Nan. But it was too late. The word had been spoken.

Nan was silent for a space. Then she said piteously—

"Jock, I do not—*quite*—understand you."

"After a little while you will."

"I thought it was all—all plain now? All ended but the dear, dear—loving! The giving—taking!"

"After a while it will be—let us hope."

This speech of a fool but terrified her the more.

"Jock, you mean that I have—only——"

She gasped there, and was silent. My own soul was so full that I could not speak.

"Jock! Speak! I am brave!"

That wild and eerie cry of Nan's which I had heard only once before.

I cowered and slunk beneath my bandages.

"Jock—you mean—that I have made myself—im—impossi-ble—to—*you!*"

"Nan!" I chided.

"Jock, tell me the truth! I am brave—braver than you think! I want the truth!"

A long silence.

"Jock, you said—'Cousin Nan'! You thought Cousin Nan! You did not think Sweetheart! Wife! You thought only the least dear thing you could think of me! And—you always will!"

I did not deny it. Fool that I was, that is just what her first revelations had made me think! Oh, can you fancy it! I was glad that she was no more than my cousin Nan!

"Jock dear, I understand," said Nan, very quietly.

And I could say no more. Her hand grew cold and limp, then slowly slipped from mine. I let it go. Nan spoke.

"Jock, I don't know what to do—quite. You must try to help me. I am alone. I have made myself an outcast. No—not the hand. It is co-old! I am co-old all through. Icy! Jock! I didn't do it right. The plan was right—yes. But I didn't do it right! And *I* must suffer for that—not you—not you any more. You shall not. Jock—I hope—I hope—you understand that I didn't mean—Jock, for God's sake understand—that I didn't *mean* to be—an—an outcast—to—you! I *am* —I *am!* *I* understand *that* now! I *am!* But I did *not* mean to be an outcast—to—*you!*"

She turned and ran from the room.

LXV

NAN ALWAYS KISSED ME BEFORE—BUT—

ALMOST instantly she returned, laughing, caressing, bewitching—the old, old Nan!

"Jock, that wasn't nice of me," she cooed. "To bother you so while you are ill! And all on my own little account! The least I can do is to be—cheerful. Well, I will be. And then, when you are quite well, and my brave and strong and handsome and splendid Jock once more—then will be the time to make you—understand better. To offer you what is left of Nan. Dare you to refuse! Aha! Oh, if there is no other way, I'll go out and get myself all crushed! To a very jelly! Be in bed! Suffering! Mutilated! Then you'll come hurrying—hurrying, as to the telegraph office—and be sweet to me! And, Jock, my dear—cousin—I *will* say cousin, too—I shall never get well! Never! And I'll call you 'Cousin' till *you* know how horrid it is. Yes! Till it makes you love me again! Don't you remember how I used to do that when we were sparring at love with our souls masked? Well, Jock, my old darling, that was just to make you love *me*—and it *helped*, didn't it?"

"Yes," I answered, in her dear humour.

"Do you know why? No—of course, dear old, dull Jock! Because then I can die in your arms! Oh, yes! You'd *have* to let me! I'm your cousin Nan—aha!"

Then she laughed, and had better have sobbed.

"Ah, don't be ill, Nan," I said. "One forgets when one would remember, and remembers when one would

give anything to forget. One refuses what he would give heaven to take! Don't be ill!"

"But I must, Jock! Don't you see? That is the only way to *make* you take me!"

I never heard more piteous laughter.

"But—once before I thought I had invented a way to make you take me! Heigho!"

Then, with a leap, back to that other mood.

"Yes, I will, too! *But* I'll be sick only long enough to make you adore me again, aha! Then I'll jump out of bed and laugh at you! Aha! And you'll understand that it was all a trick—another—which has proved more successful. And you'll forgive it and call me all the sweetheart names you know—all at once—and I'll be that sorry! And you'll ask me to marry you, and I'll say a thousand yeses, and we'll live happy ever after! Aha! There! Shan't you like that—dear, dear, *dear* old *Cousin* Jock? Why, any one would!"

"Don't be sick long—Nan. Not till your heart and mind and brain are in the chaos mine are at this moment——"

Dear Nan! Hurt as she was, she understood and helped me squirming about for a justification of my vileness toward her.

"Oh, yes! One mustn't be sick too long. That *is* tiresome. I know that *you* would swear that it was not—you're so sweet! But I *won't* be sick longer than long enough to fool you into—well—the dearest mistake you could make—for *me*. Men don't like imperfect women. So I would recover without a scar or a wrinkle, or a least blemish! I'd have my grey hair stained its original gold. And just at the time you were thinking that you would have to *endure* me, I'd wake up and show you that I was as good as new, and better too! And you'd be glad! And *want* me! You like my hair. Well, suppose it was all thin and grey! You like my eyes. Well, suppose they were blind or hidden by horrid glasses! Oh, bandages! Suppose I limped—a crutch—a huge scar on my face! No! I'd leap out of bed—the same old Nan—only better!"

I managed to get her dear hand.

"Why—Jock—*your* hand is co-old."

"Yes."

I think I shivered.

"Jock, I thought I'd be gay and happy, and make you gay and happy—the nurse said I must come right back and do it—and I've been only horrid! Jock, I can't do without some one. You can't—yet. Take me. You will have to have things brought to you—the papers read. Hire me. I'll be cheap. Jock—dear, dear Cousin Jock—must I go—or may I cry, cry, cry here?"

"Cry here," said I.

She did—very softly—in some remote corner.

Then she came to say good-bye.

"Jock, I talk as if I had a cold in my head—and it's only my heart that's co-old! And dear Cousin Jock, I don't know what to do. I have always kissed you at leaving—sometimes twice—three times. But then I thought I—somehow—belonged to you. Now I suppose it would be—improper?"

I said nothing. Nan did not. Then:

"Just—as—you—like, Jock."

She moved to go.

LXVI

WHAT HAVE SINNERS TO DO WITH THE WEDDING-RINGS OF ANGELS?

"NAN," I begged, "forgive me. But—I am a brute. I'm helpless. My brain seethes! When an immaculate thing has once been—made—oh!——"

"Go on," whispered Nan.

"A little less—it takes time to——"

After a silence Nan spoke the word I would not.

"Immaculate. Yes. I quite understand, dear, dear Jock! God bless you for your frankness."

She did not kiss me, but dropped quietly at my bedside. Thus we sat, quite silent for a long time. Then Nan said:

"I must go."

She sat still for another moment. Then I felt something slip upon my finger. My mother's wedding-ring!

I seized it, with a weak impulse to restore it to Nan's finger. But a stronger and meaner one mastered that, and I did not.

"Nan, I didn't—say—*that*," I defended. "I didn't ask—*that*."

"No, my own dear, dear Jock!" whispered Nan. "But she did. She is an angel. I am a sinner. What have sinners to do with the wedding-rings of angels? Jock—dear, dear Jock—good-bye!"

Again a silence. I had a better defence ready now. I meant to temporize, as if Nan were an erring child!

To tell her that it had all shocked me out of proportion to reason because it had come in such avalanches of recollection. My attitude had been almost entirely involuntary. I meant to ask her to wait—suspend judgment until I had become as familiar with the facts as she was; and then—when I could reason—we would talk—and no doubt to better purpose.

"Nan dear——" I began. But Nan was gone.

And chaos—a huge and chilling void in which I cowered—was come.

And what demon was so demoniac as to repeat to my sensorium at this time these words of Nan's—

"'Do you think the frivolous woman *could* love the serious man—with a broken face? I don't. Good-night.'"

And, from that on, backward all, that letter! Light enough then—deadly and sinister now—every word a stab! Go back with me and read it!

LXVII

IF I WERE AN ARCHANGEL I COULD NOT PUT THAT RING BACK!

"DOCTOR," I asked the next day, before Nan came, "is my face going to be very bad?"

He jerked off the bandage so brusquely that it hurt me. After a long look, he said:

"It's not going to be bad at all. I never saw a healthier skin at this stage. You are to be congratulated, young man!"

Nan came. I was quite happy at what the doctor had just said, and I did not then think that Nan might fancy that it was because of what had happened on the yesterday. That she might think it my solution of a sad problem to my liking.

"Nan," said I, "the end is not far off, thank God!"

"The end?" questioned Nan. Then—"No."

"When we are to be face to face."

"We are face to face now. Ever since the accident we have been not only face to face, but soul to soul. Wait? For what? Everything is decided. I have done all I could. It failed. I have made myself impossible to you. If you had wanted what I tried to give you, you would long since have asked for it—I would have given it. See how frank I am. I shall be here as long as you need me—till you see again. Then I must—go! If that is what you mean—yes, the end is not far off."

"I meant my physical presentment," I said, with

assumed lightness. "The one we will smile with at all this soon."

"Oh!" said Nan, as if that mattered nothing. "But we shall smile little enough with it, I fancy. I wish the other 'face' could be so easily—arranged."

Now I made my specious defence.

"Nan—it will be. Please wait. You have known for a long time all I have known only one day. You must have been shocked at first as I was when first I heard it."

"No, I was not," Nan said calmly. "When I knew that you would not die, I was more happy than I have ever been. I thought that all I had to do was to wait till you asked—for what—I tried to give you——"

She was silent. So was I. Then—

"You have not asked it. I have waited and waited. Oh, I thought the moment consciousness returned you would—ask royally—I would give—as royally. Instead—you—took—your mother's ring!"

I would have spoken. God knows what idle, futile words I would have used to set out an idle and futile and villainous attitude. Perhaps if I could have seen Nan at that moment in all her royal splendour of innocence, as that day in her boudoir, all this would have been impossible. But, do you understand—can you understand—that Nan was, after all, an abstraction? Illness—mind and body—the bandages—had done this. And an abstraction cannot but be immaculate.

Nan stopped me imperiously.

"You don't know as well as I do what made you accept it—what makes you keep it. A miser keeps his hoard—that it may not be stolen—you keep this that it may not be contaminated. In that you condemn me! Oh, brute that you were, you condemned me to pass upon myself my own sentence! And at the same time you took away the right of defence—the right of appeal. My heart—my soul—my poor, stammering mouth were closed! I stood mute before the most inhuman judge God ever set to judge a human being—a woman—who loves him—and had

told him so! Stop! I will not permit it! My heart is bursting with its wrong! I will not listen! You shall not speak! If you do, I will strike you as you lie here! You have nothing to say that is true. Your defence of a brutal thing will be a specious juggling with words—a lie.

"God, Jock! If you had refused it that day! If you had yourself put it back upon my finger! Held it there! Stop! I will not hear you! I know what you will say! No! That is a lie! I did not think of that then—but something more humble. I thought only of being your equal—of being worthy of you! There was not a thing in my soul which was not beautiful as the thoughts of angels.

"Well, you kept it. You thought what I did not think you *could* think of *any* woman. But you thought that of *me*—your childhood's playmate! And though in that you adjudge me vile, and though it hurts, it hurts not so much me as you. For in that you also adjudge yourself. And you have fallen. You are a beast! A cad! You are not my Jock! my knight sans peur, sans reproche! You are not the Jock

> 'Who reverenced his conscience as his king;
> Whose glory was redressing human wrong;
> Who spake no slander—no, nor listened to it;
> Who loved one only and who clave to her'—

You are the unjust judge! You are the man who acquitted Raffaellita and convicted me. You are the man who set her safely in her father's heart, and cast me out of your own! Stop! You shall not speak! For once you shall hear!

"Twice you have sinned against your dead mother's memory. Twice her name has hallowed our unhallowed comradeship. Now, listen! Listen to me! I am as immaculate as she! Do you hear? Do you understand? I am as immaculate as she! *You* have sinned against her! *You* have lied. You have thought lies of me! Once you called me a liar when I told you the truth. I said yes—because *you* were too blind to see the truth. In that yes *you* did not see

only scorn for your short-sightedness. Now I call you liar! And I call you that when you lie! And you pretend to know—understand—what immaculateness is! Brute!"

"Nan," said I, "take the ring—back——"

She savagely struck down my hand.

"Jock, if you were an archangel—if you loved me as the angels love God—if I loved you so—if to be without you meant a tortured death—a tortured future—you should not put that ring back upon my finger!

"I have condemned myself! I have made no defence—I have passed judgment upon myself—I have sentenced myself—I have entered upon my punishment. Have I not obeyed you?

"Sir, your slave salutes you! What are your further wishes?"

Quite five minutes of silence passed. Then I said:

"That, without any trial—without any sentence—defence—punishment—still standing mute—you forgive a sinner his sin—and let him put his mother's ring back upon your finger." And I sobbed.

Then the old Nan came back.

"Jock," she whispered, "what *is* the matter with me? I could not help that! Oh, I was so hurt! My heart was bursting! I had to pour it all out. But—no—you must never again put your mother's ring back on my finger! I am not for you now. I cannot be. Nor you for me. With this between us? What I have said? What you have said? No, no! Yet forgive me. Ira furor brevis est."

LXVIII

THE POOR THINGS

THERE was a knock on the door. The nurse opened it. I heard the voice of an attendant. He read, droningly—

"'Miss Nancy Merival.' Is she here? Not on the women's side."

The nurse answered yes.

Nan had turned from me in wonder at the mention of her name. The nurse handed her something.

"Why, who——" began Nan, then stopped. Presently she laughed. "Jock! Listen." She read: "'J. Percy Crowninshield,' the violinist! 'Albrecht Featherstone Glück,' the palmist! 'Fillimore P. Chugg,' the mandolinist! 'Grant Colfax Crinodore,' the dramatist——"

She stopped to laugh, and then read, dramatically—"'Bellerophon Bunnie,' the poet!"

Into my hand she thrust several thick pages fastened with a pin at the corner.

"A poem, Jock! 'Heimweh; or, Lines to N.'"

She read, laughing, but wanting to cry—

She stopped to laugh again.

"Though the world may call thee bad—
Wicked wanton, reckless jade,
Swear that thou wast on a spree
With the evil Porphory,
Swear, and turn its back on thee—
We'll be true as we've been tried—
Every rumour we'll deny,
Give to every lie the lie—
We will hail thee as before
Goddess of the happy four—

Five to be exact—although
Not to rhyme—for every blow
Add another bright halo!
Let us see thee when thou'rt well,
To us all the story tell,
Through the world we'll go on quest—
North and east and south and west,
Centre to circumference,
With no thought of recompense,
Shout the truth with glad acclaim
Bring you back a brightened name,
Take these roses—in them see
What we think of it—and thee!"

"Jock—feel! Smell!"

It was a huge bunch of fragrant roses which she thrust into my face.

"Now, this!"

It seemed a ragged piece of paper.

"That is Albrecht Featherstone Glück!"

She put a neat piece of thick card into my hand next. The corners were trimmed off.

"Grant Colfax Crinodore!"

I began to understand.

"Grant and Colfax ran for something long ago, you know. *I* don't quite know what."

"Yes," I laughed.

"Jock! This is best of all."

Another and larger piece of paper conventionally square.

"J. Percy Crowninshield—Jock." Nan's voice broke a little. "Jock, it is a sheet of manuscript music. At the top is this—

THE HEART OF SORROW
A Song
FROM THE OPERA OF PENSEZ-VOUS
BY
NANCY MERIVAL AND
J: PERCY CROWNINSHIELD

"Spare me the song," said I:

"Yes. But, Jock," said Nan, with suspicions of tears:

"The idiot!" said I, with some heat at Nan's tribute to him.

"No, Jock, please," begged Nan. "They—came with the flowers."

"Did none of them have such a thing as a visiting-card?"

There was, once more, a little laugh from Nan:

"No!"—as if Nan were glad! Then—"Yes! Here it is. *Mr.* Fillimore P. Chugg."

It was a very flexible and very small card, with one side glazed. I could feel no engraving on its smooth surface.

"Written, I suppose?" laughed I.

"Yes," said Nan, "by a great expert with the pen. It is a bird running away with something in its mouth. The name is on that—something taken from a clothes-line!"

Nan laughed again:

"There is another piece of the same thing at the other side. I have just discovered it. With something written on it. I wonder if it is dreadful?"

"Read it," laughed I.

Nan read: "'Si peccavi ignosce.' I think I've seen it in the back of the dictionary."

"You have," said I, "and——"

"*Is* it dreadful, Jock?"

"It means, 'I have sinned; forget it!'"

Nan was not sure whether or not to laugh. But she finally did it.

"Jock, your translation must be a little—free."

We both laughed at this.

"It always seemed strange that you should surround yourself with such—harpies when—— Your money was all——"

"Jock," interrupted Nan, with infinite softness, "these roses cost at least a dollar apiece. There are two dozen of them."

"Well," said I, "what of that?"

"Jock"—still more softly, as she returned to my side and knelt on the floor—"remember that the palmist almost never missed my tea. And he always

emptied the cracker-jar—no, not quite. He would leave one. Sometimes only a piece of one. But he was very polite about it. He would wait till I wasn't looking—or had got up to get something. When they were all gone for enough minutes to be polite, he would go to the window, whistling, and I would pretend to be doing something else, while I filled the jar again. Once we were both splendidly fooled. I *had* no more. When he came back and gaily put his hand into the jar—I had to go away a minute. *He* went a minute later. He was *so* thin and hollow-cheeked! I was glad of any excuse to feed him! I was glad the dramatist had enough money presently to buy the frock-coat. His trousers, you know. Oh, Jock, I liked to pay for his poor recitations! And the mandolinist—Jock, when I first knew him he had three strings tied with red twine—such as the apothecaries use—below the bridge. You remember there was only one when you saw him. And the palmist—violinist—I suppose it is really necessary for palmists and violinists to have nice cuffs. It spoils the music and the air of truth so to see them fringed—and not very clean. Jock, one day I came in suddenly, and *he*—the violinist—was trimming off the fringes with the little scissors I kept at the corner of the mantel for Glück. Jock, you've seen the poet's shoes! Nothing gives one away like shoes! And the palmist, who quite hated him because he, too, ate a good many more biscuits than was polite (but Glück said more than was good for him), *told* me that he had no waistcoat, that that was why he always wore his coat buttoned! Jock, *you* wouldn't take my money—nor me! They would—thank God!"

"Yes, you were the good angel for the lot of them! The happy scamps! Nan, forgive me! No wonder they adored you!"

"Jock, they had no one *but* me! I had no one but them. I have not now."

"Ah—that was enough—if they had you!"

"I don't think there was a soul in the world who cared for them—but me. And, Jock, *I* was so lonely!

And everybody else kept away, way off! Oh, I had no one but them! And, oh, it *was* sweet to know that there was some one who would die for you!"

I laughed a little incredulously.

"Would they?"

"Yes," said Nan, very simply: "Every one of them!"

I tried to laugh my doubt of this into Nan's heart. But the shaft only returned to wound my own.

"Jock—forgive me—I do not mean it nastily; but, oh, my Jock, there is not one of them—not one! do you hear?—who would not be proud and glad to let me wear his dead mother's wedding-ring!"

Ah, how that struck through and through my heart and showed me myself! And what followed—and what I seemed to know *would* follow—from Nan only wounded the wound afresh!

"And Jock—my dear, dear Jock—whatever *you* may think of them, you must not think their mothers are less sacred, less immaculate than yours. You must not think they love them less, revere them less—nor that in giving me their mother's ring they would be giving less than you!"

"Nan, don't!" I cried, as if for mercy. "You are not only pouring coals—you are pouring them into my heart! Upon its wounds!"

"I will stop, Jock. I don't want to hurt you. I want to bear all the hurt myself—as I deserve. But I do want some one to adore me! Some one to believe in me—trust me—take me—keep me!"

"Nan, I——" I began.

"Oh, if you knew how a woman needs that! How I need it more than any! And how I have had to pretend that I need it less!"

Again I essayed to speak:

"No, no, no! Not you! You cannot. But, oh, Jock! I want *them*—I want them—I want *them!* You must let me have them back! I cannot be alone! It is too dreadful!"

"No, no, no, Nan dear," I said.

"They are all I have!"

"After you take me back—and the ring?"

I held it out to her.

"Jock, don't, don't, don't! You tempt me cruelly. And don't call me dear! It is sacrilege—a lie! Let us not lie! You said, when you took it, 'Thou art weighed in the balance and found wanting.' Don't offer me the ring!"

I had slipped it on her finger: Now she knew, and tried fiercely to dislodge it. I did as she told me—held it fast.

"With all my heart, dear Nan," I begged.

"With all your heart? Are you sure? Oh, Jock! If you were sure—I'd keep it!"

"Your Poor Things have taught me my lesson. Have they taught you none?"

"Why, Jock! Yes! They have forgiven me!"

"Forgive me!"

"You?"

Nan passed her hands over mine as I had seen her do as a child when she was tired. I took them and held them long at my lips.

Nan took them away, and put her own lips there.

"Nan," I said, "in that we abandon everything but each other. Honour—if still it needs me—Cawdor—whether or not he still needs me—Aunt Izzy, to whom I have a duty——"

"Jock, let me tell you again—they are all gone—all washed away in my dishonour. There is *no* one but you and me."

"I shall think of no one but you," I said.

"And, Jock, I of you! All—all my life!"

So we sat there, having left the world behind at last, to plunge forward alone—together!

"Jock," whispered Nan, "you make me so happy—that—— May I cry?"

I said she might, and she did—a lovely gust of rain and storm.

Then:

"Jock, forgive what I said about your mother. I am not often like that. I will never, never be—if you let me keep the ring—with all your heart! I am

not like her. I *am* a sinner. Oh, I wish you were a sinner, too. Please be a sinner—just a little one—for me!"

I assured Nan that I would not only be one, but that I had always been a sinner. Nevertheless, that I would be as much more of a sinner as would add to her happiness.

"It will be much better that way, Jock dear. Then I can always feel as good as you!"

"Better, my dear sweetheart," said I.

"Say it again—sweet-heart!" begged Nan.

I did.

And then Nan ended the rather tragic incident by saying:

"And, Jock, I didn't mean that about the archangel—and heaven—and love—and torture—not one word! I had better have said damn and been done with it. Vox et praeterea nihil."

I was happy to think that she did not. I told her so. Because if I should ever become an archangel it might be awkward.

"Jock, that was the last of that old, ugly Nan who used to say the damns—indeed it was! I must live up to my grey hairs!"

"Nan," said I, "even as my wounds are, as you say, for you, by you, so are your grey hairs for me, by me. My scars, when you see them, and grey hair, when I see it, ought to be an irrefragable bond between us!"

"Why, Jock, my darling, you will never know your old, tempestuous Nan! She is more like a nun now—really, Jock. Don't mind that last outbreak. There are no more lies and damns inside of her. So, you see, they *can't* come out. How could there be, with you mother's ring on my finger—now? Yes, Jock, your scars and my grey hair will be the most irrefragable bond between us that could be. Every time we see them we will know that each has suffered for the other. And I—Jock, I shall kiss the huge scar the moment it is uncovered, and thus make it—oh—let me see! What do I want to say?"

"Disappear?"

"Ah, dear, dear Jock, I wish I could! Perhaps, after a while, I can—I shall adore you so! Jock, I meant hallowed!"

I let the word filter down into my soul. I liked it. And so, indeed, it should be. Nan's kiss should hallow my scars. I even thought I should be proud of them! For the moment I was impatient for her to see them!

After the little silence, Nan said:

"Jock, do you understand what this means—the costly flowers—the silly music—the awful poetry?"

"That they adore you?"

"No. It means that it does not matter to them. The Poor Things think they are the world! That if they say it does not matter—that I am not disgraced—why, it does not! And they have spent twenty-four dollars to tell me! Jock——"

Nan laughed, then half sobbed:

"I wonder *where* they got it! I said the world had closed its doors upon me. But here is one that is open still—a small one—oh, I wonder *where* they got twenty-four dollars!"

I took Nan's small hand.

"I wonder, dear, dear Nan, where they get food and clothing since——"

"Hush!" said Nan.

"Nan, I didn't know that in making you give them up I had taken so much from you."

"No," said Nan hastily.

Then one of our dear little silences fell.

"Dear, dear vagabonds! I wish there were more of them!"

I could not make out what she did just then.

"Nan," asked I, "are you kissing those roses?"

"Yes!" said Nan. "Each one!"

"And are you crying over them?"

"Laughing!" answered Nan.

"Crying!"

"Laughing!"

Then she did laugh:

"But, oh, Jock, it is good to know that some one

—out in the horrid world—even these—believe——"

"Nan, I believe."

"But—would you if it cost you twenty-four dollars you didn't have to tell me so?" Nan laughed.

"Don't," I pleaded. "You have heaped coals enough upon my heart."

"Ah, let me, Jock dear. Don't you see that they brought me—us—our happiness? Don't you understand that it took them to make us see? You as well as me? And, oh, Jock, we shall always adore them for that, if for nothing else! My Poor Things. For, Jock, after all, they are innocent and harmless and playful and conceited as little children. May I adore them? And will you? And some day we will send for them all, and show them how happy we are!"

"Nan, my dear sweetheart—yes," I said; "for now we understand everything. There is nothing else. We know all there is to know. Are you satisfied? As I am?"

Nan answered me:

"Say it again—dear sweet-heart!"

Again I did.

"Then, as soon as the doctors have finished patching me——"

Again my insatiate demon whispered Nan's other words on that subject:

"Do you think the frivolous woman *could* love the serious man—with a broken face? I don't. Good-night."

And all the rest of it.

LXIX

THERE IS ONLY ONE THING

THE nurse—who had entered—put her thermometer into my mouth—thank God!

"His fever is rising," she said. Then, to Nan: "You must go."

They unwittingly left the door a little ajar.

I heard the nurse say, as she went—

"He must have been a lovely young man before——"

"Yes."

Nan sobbed a little.

"I pity him, too," said the nurse.

"I *don't* pity him!" cried Nan.

"No one will care for him now! I know: Disfigured people are always—embarrassing to their friends. I remember a very handsome man——"

"He will not be embarrassing to me," said Nan.

"Dear, you don't know. You will not know until you see him. I have experienced too much of that sort of thing to be mistaken. You are only his second cousin."

"I do know. It was I who hurt him."

"Oh!" said the nurse. "It seems strange—but, mostly, they are the worst. Sometimes they're actually bitter!"

How the nurse seemed to revel in this malediction upon humanity!

"They might be very—very sorry," said Nan, with great gentleness; "they could not help that. But not bitter! That is hard to credit."

The nurse reinforced her position:

"You see, they feel that they *must* be nice to them —*must* pity them. And there is no better way to make one person hate another than to try to compel him to like another. And even pity—— How they hate that! Besides, the injured always expect it. And one knows that they do, and that they are likely to be hurt if——"

"But, nurse! When he has done it *for* that one! To save her! When she has been the cause of it! The wanton cause of it! Surely, nurse dear, that——"

The nurse laughed. "They soon forget that! There is only one thing——"

"What?" asked Nan.

The nurse did not at once answer her. She paused, and I fancied her regarding Nan questioningly.

"I once had a case like this, and the woman kissed and cried over every scar when the bandages came off. She said he was dearer to her than before. She, too, had caused it. She acted as if he were. Each scar seemed a beauty mark to her!" The nurse laughed a little. "Yes—there is only one thing——"

"What?" asked Nan again.

"Love," said the nurse.

"Love," whispered Nan, with celestial softness. "Then *we* are quite safe."

LXX

IT IS NOT A LITTLE THING TO TAKE ONE'S SELF AWAY FROM—NAN

I THOUGHT of this a great deal. It disturbed me for several days. What the nurse had said I knew to be true. Deformed men—crippled men—disfigured men—mutilated men—all these I had seen at one time or another in the midst of their friends. And never had I known it to be other than as the nurse had said—at the least, embarrassing to them. I remembered that they had all been regarded as poor devils to be pitied and set in a corner like a reminder of the instability of life and health. Even the veterans of the war, haloed with inarticulate glory, became very tiresome after a little while. And I was the victim of what would be regarded as a silly and fruitless risk! I was the architect of my own ruin! I had brought it on myself for an insufficient cause! There might be pity for me. But more likely derision.

I understood that the world would shrug its shoulders and say:

"Why did he stop her? Why did he not let her go? If she wished to go, she might as well have gone. The will to do a deed—of that sort—is as damning as the doing of the deed. And there was not only the will to do the deed, but the deed done and only estopped by physical force. Well—physical force is a very uncertain reformer of morals. It will possibly happen again. Or if it does not, the reason will be lack of opportunity: He is a fool!"

Well, Nan herself had said that no woman could love a fool.

I tried to fancy that if a woman should love a man with very great devotion, it would make a difference. Then I imagined the kind of woman who was likely to do this. Then—I thought of Nan! Was Nan such?

Sometimes yes, sometimes no to that.

I gathered data. I tried to remember every case of the sort I had known. They were few. And why? The world was full of cripples. At last I understood that they were usually lonely and alone. And those women I could recall who had married cripples? Their duty—their devotion—seemed to end at the altar. After that their cripples were more and more forgotten—more and more neglected. I remembered some of these whom their wives scarcely knew. I recalled their hunger for comradeship, their wistful yearning for understanding, their altogether forlornness. Somewhere I had seen—long ago—that a large percentage of suicides were cripples. I remembered that I had thought then that if I were hopelessly crippled I should join them. A man with a huge, livid scar would come to see my father when I was a child. His half hour of communion was given him grudgingly—but with heroic insistence.

There was a time in this quest when I recklessly thanked God that there was no one from whom I could not go at a moment's notice—whose pity I could not stifle with a blow in the face. And then something within slyly asked:

"No one?"

And I remembered Nan, and answered:

"Even from her pity, if it were that, I would *hurry!* I will *not* become piteous to my—friends!" I said. "The pity of strangers is odious enough. But it is infinitely less so than that of one's friends. And the closer they are, the more terrible it is! And so, if I am to become an object of pity, strangers shall pity me. If it should become unbearable, I can slap their faces. I cannot slap the face of my friends. Besides, strangers will not dissemble an interest or affection they do not

feel. My friends will. They think they must—that it is kind!"

"But *Nan!*" said the thing within. "But Nan!" it insisted. Alas! my logical finery went into rags. It is not easy—it is not a little thing—to take one's self away from—Nan! Even in fancy.

As I thought on I knew that all the rest had been sophistry, and that there was nothing but—Nan. And I must have hoped all the while that my deductions were founded upon false premises, and that Nan would prove to be different from any of the women I had thought of. Ah, I was sure she would, should there be any necessity.

For, after all—I never before had allowed myself to think this, and never did afterward—it had all been for Nan!

Nan loved me. I loved her. Even the doubting nurse had said that love was sufficient to this crisis!

"'Do you think the frivolous woman *could* love the serious man—with a broken face? I don't. Good-night.'"

But *I* smiled another answer to this!

I turned upon the nurse as if she had said it. My severity was most admirable—inasmuch as I hoped it would not induce the nurse to say what I did not wish to hear.

"Nurse! I want to know the truth about this face of mine!"

"Certainly," answered the nurse, with the utmost cheer.

"Well, then, how bad is it going to be?"

"It will not be 'bad' at all."

"What! No scars? No marks? No——" With all my joy at the nurse's words, I hesitated a little at that. But then I put it forth. "No—redness?—and—and—so on?"

"Oh! a little at first, perhaps."

"Then why can't I have a mirror?"

"The hospital has its rules."

"Oh, well——" I grumbled, more happy than I cared then, or now, to confess. Yet, why not? Is any one entirely careless of his personal appearance? If he is, he's a fool. And I was to undergo the inspection of Nan,

presently: Besides, I have already confessed my pride in my physical perfection—such as it was—as well as my extreme sensitiveness to any mention or criticism of such defects as I possessed together with the rest.

LXXI

PIANISSIMO

SO my mood took on a great lightness concerning my wounds. This surprised Nan. I sent every other consideration to the rear, and adored Nan. This surprised her more. I became such a gay and militant wooer that Nan herself, in vast and splendid wonder and surprise, took sanctuary now and then.

Why, one of my propositions was that we be married while I was still abed! Fortunately, Nan laughed suddenly:

"Oh, Jock!" she whispered—the nurse was there—"they'll think you are dying! And that I'm to be your widow and get all your money!"

I laughed.

"Thank you for a narrow escape. But—it must be the moment——"

"Jock, what *is* the matter?" was Nan's joyous complaint: "You were splendid *that* day. But now, Jock—if you were not chained to this bed I should be—afraid of you! Oh, you'd do like those impatient chaps did with the Turbine women!"

But, to show that she was not quite as much afraid as her words declared, Nan laughed and plunged her head upon my pillow by the side of mine.

"For 'Turbine' read 'Sabine,' Nan dear," said I. "And—yes, I would! And then repent it—as they did."

"Repent it! I wouldn't let you!"

"How would you prevent it?"

"I'd make you jealous!"

"Original and effective!" I admitted.

"And I'd *keep* you jealous!"

"Better and better. And I'd always wear a mask—aha! Doesn't that go you one better?"

"No! Not at all! How would that help you?"

"You wouldn't know what was behind it."

"Well?"

"The moment you found out it was an ogre, your—er—interest would vanish."

"Oh!" Then, in an instant: "I don't know what's behind it now—and my—er—interest *grows!*"

A moment of the old fear chilled my gaiety. Nan felt this. She went on with divine richness and softness:

"Yes, I do, Jock—quite as if I had seen it. I was anxious. I asked the nurse. Imagine my joy when she told me it was nothing! That at first there might be slight reminders of the accident, but that in a very little while there would be nothing—almost—oh, she said 'absolutely'—absolutely nothing! Remember that if there had been, it would have made no difference. But, oh, oh! Jock, think of it being before me all my life! I asked her again only the other day. She laughed at my anxiety and warned me—do you hear?" Nan laughed. "Warned me that there would be a light scar here——" She traced it on my bandage. "Another here——" She traced that one. "Why, Jock, I shouldn't care if it were one huge, huge scar!—if you wouldn't *hate* me for it—and curse me every time you looked into the glass! That is what worries me. I'll not be sure of you till you *see*. Listen, Jock! This is the only way to be safe from your curses—not to look into the glass until they are all, all gone! Will you, Jock dear? Won't you?"

I hesitated in specious rebellion.

"Please! For me—your naughty Nan! Oh, I will be a better and bigger glass than any in the world. And I will tell you more true! And wouldn't I be a nicer mirror than a mere piece of—glass!"

"Yes," I laughed, as happily as she. "I will—and I won't."

"And I will tell you true—the moment I see it! And you are not to look until I permit it! Promise!"

"I promise!"

"Then it's a bargain?"

"Then it's a bargain. And I can say things to you which, maybe, I couldn't if I should look!"

"Jock! Won't you be as sweet then as you are now?" Nan seemed really distressed for this.

"Well, you know, Nan, how it is in the darkness—or the moonlight—or behind a screen. We can say things we couldn't——"

She laughingly kissed me and went, but returned a moment to say, with strange hesitancy for Nan:

"It's not a happy subject—considering. But, Jock, we talk of anything now, don't we?"

Her voice begged me to say that we did, and I said it.

"There has been a *successful* elopement from our house!"

"Good heavens! Nausicaa?" I guessed.

"And the poet," said Nan, with a laughing rue which made me endanger my recovery with laughter.

"Such goings on!" she proceeded, as if in immense pique. "Quite a love-match."

"She has beaten the sibyl, notwithstanding the freckles!" said I.

This had to be explained to Nan.

"It wasn't the sibyl's fault. It was mine. I brought them together. Poor thing!"

"Oh, he won't mind."

"*I* meant Nausicaa."

"*I* meant Bunnie."

"De gustibus non est disputandum," said Nan. "I have Raffaellita now."

"Oh!" said I happily.

"And Pianissimo."

"Who? What?" I gasped.

"The baby, stupid old Jock!"

"Oh! I see! Another invention. The Poor Things may come, the Poor Thing may go, but Nan goes on—inventing names!"

"Yes," joyed Nan. "Isn't it lovely?"

"Lovely—but obscure," said I.

"You *are* dull, Jock dear. He's so soft—and—low!"

LXXII

ONE ON ACCOUNT—AND NO MORE

"NAN," I laughed, "the repairs will be complete on the twenty-sixth. The doctors have just left—after saying so. I am discharged to-day—as good as new. They said that. The nurse said it. You say it. I say it."

"Hurrah!" cried Nan. "I never had the least doubt of it! To die when I needed you! It wasn't at all like you, Jock dear!"

"Or even to have a horrid face when Nan liked——"

"The other one!"

We laughed.

"Nan—this day is worthy of a celebration, too. Before you go, won't you please kiss me thr——"

"Jock! What *is* the matter?"

But then she swooped upon my face and kissed me gustily, saying:

"There's one on account!"

"Nan," I joyed, "it is good—good to live! To be whole once more! To have you——"

"To-day—to-morrow—the next day—for ever and ever—dear, dear Jock."

"Then I'll *see* you do it!"

"Kiss you?" She pretended immense shyness. "And I'll be horribly ashamed to be *seen!* Yes, Jock, I suppose the bandages *have* their effect."

"And I'll be horridly afraid!" I countered.

"Of the Nan who has let you see—oh, *into*—her very soul! Oh, Jock!"

"But—if they have lied to me—if it should be repulsive—red—horrid! I'd want to—oh, I'd strike it myself! As if it were some one else had offended you!"

"And I'd kiss it! I will! The moment the bandage is off! On the very worst and biggest of the scars! And I shall adore it all the more. Because it was hurt for me! And, oh, because by its hurting I could give myself to you—I had to! You could give yourself to me—you had to!"

My dear Nan caught a sob there, laughed, then rattled deliciously on.

"Why, Jock, as soon as you can go out I will be with you hour by hour, minute by minute, second by second! I shall have your dear face always! Afraid! And now you will soon be perfectly well! Then think of the long walks in the park! The lunches on a bench! The stories and songs! Oh, now it is remember—Jock!"

"And am I to call *you* sweetheart-names?"

"As many and as sweet as you can invent. As many and much as your love is!"

"Do you know how much that is?"

"No. But be merciful and tell me anyhow."

"Can you see the horizon?"

"Yes—out of the window."

"And the sky?"

"Yes—through the skylight—just as if it were all made to aid your illustration!"

"It was. And the earth?"

"Yes—in the mirror."

"Well—those are the boundaries of—a very little of it!"

"Jock! But how will you bound the rest, then? You've used everything up!"

"To-night look at the furthest star. That will be a little more."

"Is there still more?"

"In the morning listen where the morning stars sing. That will be still a little more."

"But it is all used up *now*. The whole universe!"

"Then think of heaven—the angels—the golden streets—the jasper walls—the crystal gates——"

I laughed and halted.

Nan laughed.

"Now—is it all done?"—with a pretty regret.

"No!" I cried. "My vocabulary is."

"Jock—you *do* love me," whispered Nan.

"Well," I laughed, "I do the best I can."

Nan swooped to kiss me. But she stopped.

"No! You only asked for three! And I must save one for the scar."

"But—you are saving two!"

She saved only one!

"And won't it be gorgeous! Down by the sea? It's getting warm now, Jock. Soon we'll be off. Then—no one but you and me—and some one to make it all very proper. Oh, don't you see how I have reformed! Nan thinking of propriety!"

"The sea?" said I, puzzled.

"Oh—I came to tell you and forgot! You were so—so very splendid! Well, then, you are to be my guest, you know—perhaps my husband. I have taken a house by the sea. And you are to stay until you are quite well. Hush! It is all arranged. It will be perfectly lovely. One whole floor is to be yours. You are to do there as you like. And I will always be listening for your bell!"

We could hear the nurse approaching along the tiled corridor. Nan swooped upon me with a sudden thought.

"Oh, Jock! There comes the nurse. Let's make her let us see your dear old scars to-day! It's only three days, anyhow! I know she'll do it if we make her!"

LXXIII

UPON THAT MOMENT I HAD HUNG MY HAPPINESS

THE nurse knocked and entered.

"Nurse," cried I, "can't we see it to-day?"

The nurse stopped where she was, was silent a moment, then felt my pulse.

"You are very happy to-day," she said kindly.

"Yes!" Nan and I chorussed together.

To Nan:

"Are *you* ready?"

"Ready?" said Nan, a little confused by the sudden plunge toward reality, but laughing happily. "Why, nurse, I was the chief conspirator in the plot to coerce you!"

"Well, I think you may," acquiesced the nurse, very gently. "When one is happy—is the time to meet dif—— Now lie quite still. I will undo the bandages—for the last time, I hope." She did so, leaving them lying loosely upon my face, so that I could for the first time see a little daylight. How good that little light was! "The light had better reach your eyes slowly. I'll take away the appliances, too. We do the best we can. But our best is sometimes poor enough. You must try and remember that. You had better not see all the things we have used to make you well."

Even the nurse was quite gay as she went softly about the room, putting together instruments and glass that clinked. She laughed a little. "You had better wait a few minutes till your eyes are a little more accustomed to the light."

"I hope," I said, with a strange tremor, putting out my hand blindly, "that I shall not prove ungrateful for your very great devotion."

The nurse took my hand and held it.

"We have done our best—our very best. Your case has interested every surgeon in the hospital. I will open the blinds—then go. I think you will prefer to be alone with your——" After an instant of hesitation—"cousin."

"Yes," said I, "if you will be so good." During all this Nan had said nothing.

I heard the nurse adjust the blinds. Then she came and put something down on the bed.

"He will ask for—that," she whispered.

"No," laughed Nan; "take it away. *I* am to be his mirror. I am to tell him true! He does not want it."

"Be careful. You will not see anything accurately for some days. But then—— In the meantime you must try and be patient with—your——"

Nan checked her somehow.

"—your sight," the nurse finished.

At the door she halted.

"Do not be over-sanguine," she said to Nan, very gently. "I wish you—joy. Good-bye."

The door opened and closed.

Nan, who had been standing, knelt at my bedside. But she did not at once speak. I found her hand. It was cold.

"Jock," laughed Nan, in a shaky voice, "she has made me afraid! I'm glad she's gone. I'm—I'm free-eezing! Shi-shi-shivering! Can't you feel me?"

"And it will not make any difference? Are you sure? Before you see?"

As she halted, something within stopped going for an instant.

"I told you what the difference would be! It seems years ago. Now, once more, the dear old face! I cannot wait! It will be so sweet—oh, Jock, so sweet! You cannot fancy what it has been to me day by day to speak to a white mask! But now—hurry! I want to kiss it! The huge, huge scar!"

"Ready?" I laughed, with my hands on the linen.

"Yes," said Nan, laughing too, and coming closer.

"One—two—three!"

I flung the bandages off.

Nan gasped—caught her throat—gasped again: I felt her shrink: Even my unused eyes saw the terror which swept across her face. She tried with piteous bravery to banish it. She laughed: But it was in her laughter—and more terrible for it: Still gripping her courage—shivering—shuddering—staring—with the courage of the coward in his first sudden battle—she pushed her lips slowly toward me—to give the kiss she had promised—owed—to my livid scars! But that which had been very precious to me a moment before I could not take now. I felt its own terrors as it came shuddering toward my lips. If she had kissed me then, I think I should have struck her:

I put out my hand and withheld her: And—ah, God!—I knew that she was glad. She breathed her relief, and would have withdrawn had I let her. But I wanted to fix the glory of the face *I* saw for ever in my soul: So with the other hand I held her face above mine for the brief space of a moment—she breathless, sobbing, dilating with horror—I calm, as if I had died.

Oh, she saw my face—yes! But I did not think of that then. It was to see hers that I gave her that moment of horror—that I held it quivering close above my own:

Her face! I looked in that hurtling instant for the lines of which she had spoken. Well, perhaps the little suffering had done its work: Perhaps my unused eyes saw illy. I thought I had Nan safely pictured within: Yet of the splendour of this face I had not the dimmest fancy! To me it was transcendent. Fancy this girlish-faced, happy Nan suddenly grown ivory pale—thinner—but with lines of faultless purity—with a tuft of white showing above each temple in her hair! She *might* have had phylacteries about her face! She was nun and goddess at once! And I, who had loved her before, adored her now!—when she shuddered at my face:

I replaced the bandage to shut her for ever from my sight. Nan tried to get it back:

"Jock—Jock—Jock! I didn't! I didn't!" in a terrified whisper.

"I cannot have it off permanently yet," I said, as bravely as I could. But I did not quite deceive Nan.

"Jock, forgive me! You must!"

She swooped and kissed the bandages. She tried to tear them off. I held them on.

"Oh, it shall not—*not* make any difference! Jock—Jock! Oh, believe me!"

"Why, Nan dear—that is my first sweetheart word under the new régime—I *do* believe you!"

"Have a little patience—help me—let me help you—it was so sudden—they did not tell us quite the truth about it, Jock. Oh, I will be as sweet to you as you are to me—yes! That will be very hard, I know, but I can! I will be—as sweet to you as you are to me!"

"Yes," I said. "I *know* that!"

Oh, strange fate! Upon that little moment I had hung my happiness! I knew that now!

Well—the moment had come and gone!

"Forward! To the end!" cried my soul.

I could hear Nan trying to stifle her gasping—sobbing. I let my hand limply leave hers, and pretended to doze.

I understood somehow that Nan was glad of this. Her breathing became more regular. Presently she leaned over me—coming slowly closer. When she was quite close she whispered:

"Jock! Are you asleep?"

I did not answer.

"Jock—" more strongly—"are—you—asleep?"

I answered as if from the far place:

"I—nev—nev-er—was so—sleepy! Let me sleep—"

"Jock—I am—Nan."

"Oh! When—did—you—come?"

"Long, long ago, it seems. Jock, are you happy?"

"Very."

"And are you not angry?"

"No."

"Not one little bit?"

"No."

"You remember, Jock dear, that we looked at your dear face. And I was horrid. But I will never be again: I am sorry. Jock, do you forgive me?"

"My face? Oh! Yes. I forgive—I must sleep! Come to-morrow—Nan—dear, dear Nan."

"Yes," whispered Nan. "Good-bye."

I did not answer. I breathed more deeply.

"Jock—do you hear?"

I did not answer.

"Jock——"

She leaned impulsively over me. Perhaps she meant to give me the kiss she still owed. The moment was one of exquisite torture to me. But she suddenly halted, raised the bandage, put it hastily down, and rose. I heard her do something at the blinds—something at the dressing-bureau.

Then she went out.

LXXIV

BLOOD: UPON THE CARD—THE DOOR—THE BED

I FOUGHT myself upright—flinging the bandages off madly. The room reeled about me sickeningly. Out of the bed! My legs doubled under me. Footsteps came hurrying over the paved corridor. The nurse. I understood. She had seen Nan go. I plunged drunkenly to the door and turned the key. Then I laughed. So much like a hero of melodrama was I in this most pregnant moment of my life. With my back now against the door, I faced the room. How strange and vague and dark it all was! I rubbed my eyes. They saw quite well. And how different was the aspect of that room from what I had fancied it! Ah, God! What Nan had made it! Sordid it was—depressing—terrible! Suddenly I thought of all the men who had languished and died there in that bed—where I had failed to languish and die—as I should have done!

The nurse knocked. I staggered to the mirror. She tried the door. The place of the mirror looked strange. The nurse called gently my name. I shot the blind up! The splendid sun flooded the room—and me. For the first moment of its assault I staggered away and shaded my eyes. The nurse fruitlessly tried a key in the lock. I shot the other blind to its limit. More sun! But I laughed—to the sun now—and for a moment held out my cold hands to it. It was good! Friendly! It cared not that my face was scarred. I heard the nurse run along the corridor—for help, I fancied. I had kept my back to the mirror—glad that I might delay looking.

It was with difficulty that I brought my face to it. When I had done so I breathlessly thanked God. It was covered. Nan had told me true. I need not look. I would not. I would never look. I did not wish to look. As I stood there I suddenly hated the face which had brought such terror into Nan's. I struck it savagely with my clenched fists.

Upon the sheet which covered the mirror was pinned one of Nan's visiting cards. This was written upon it:

"No, Jock dear. You must give me another chance to tell you true. Keep your promise. I will keep mine."

There was blood upon the card—the door—the bed as I staggered in turn to each.

* * * * *

I heard the confused noises of people entering at my door.

Then some one said:

"Why—it is open! You must have been mistaken. S-sh! S-sh!"

They entered.

"Yes—I was mistaken," whispered the nurse. "He is asleep. Everything except the mirror is as I left it. They have got through it safely."

"He is asleep?" said another. "Then he did not mind."

"Nor she," said still another.

"She did not flinch," said the first. "I was sure she wouldn't."

"She is one in a thousand," said the nurse.

"A million!"

"It is mighty hard to have to tell a man like him a lie. And to keep it up day after day. Especially about a thing which he must see is a lie sooner or later. To keep bandages on which ought to be off—so that some one he loves and who will love him as long as she does not see his face—and no longer—may be kept a little more. I'll not be able to look him in the face to-morrow. But I did it for him. He is so good!"

" He's just the sort of man who will hide his face so that you won't have to look into it."

" Yes ! "

" He'd probably think of your embarrassment before his own."

" Is he never going to be better ? What does Dr. Potter think ? "

" He says God knows ! "

" I wonder what happened ? "

" It's queer—that mirror ! "

" No "—this was the nurse. " They agreed upon that before. And I am glad they did. That's what has saved him. He was not to look into a mirror. *She* was to tell him true."

" And she told him a lie ! "

" Yes—that's right."

" No—that's wrong ! "

" Why ? "

" Why ? Some day he'll know that she lied: What then ? "

LXXV

DE MORTUIS

THAT first day of my sight was the busiest of my life. To-day I do not understand how I dragged myself through it.

Aunt Izzy's letter came—very early in the morning.

"I am pained, dear Jock," she wrote, "to tell you how I am displeased with Cawdor. I was shocked to find, when I arrived—you will remember that I meant to surprise him—that he was calling on a certain young woman named Murgatroyd. I did not see him that day, and on the next, when I went again, he was again calling on—Miss Murgatroyd! I then—very naturally—gave up the idea of surprising him, and left a note. He dutifully came to see me the next day. After half an hour of extremely unsatisfactory talk—and not so much as a voluntary kiss—he said he must go. I remembered that it was then about the same hour at which I had called on the two preceding days. '*Must* you see Miss Murgatroyd to-day, too?' said I. He blushed—and went! And he has since made no explanation. But he shall—and that soon—when Nancy comes! I think I can promise you that there will be no more calls on Miss Elise Murgatroyd! Now, you are not to say a word of this to Nancy. But, on the contrary, you are simply to urge her to come over at once. I am writing to her by this mail, making the same suggestion. I'll flash her upon him. Once she is here, there can be but one issue. Why, Elise cannot hold a candle to our Nancy—not even a very small one! And when Nancy arrives Miss

Elise will have to find some one else who plays tennis divinely. I believe that is her reason for wanting Cawdor so much. What his reason is for wanting her is quite hopeless to find out. A more uninteresting girl I never met. Yes, I have 'met' her! Cawdor brought her to see me with great pride. I suppose he thought I would say nice things to her, but I did not. I only *looked* at her. And it made her uncomfortable, I can tell you! I think she quite understood me—that she was little short of impudent—making up to our Cawdor! He still makes no excuses for his attitude toward Nancy. He asks about her in the most formal fashion, as if no one ever knew that they were engaged. But he feels his position. And I don't want him to confess his wrongdoing—or anything—until Nancy arrives. Then it will come in a torrent—when he sees what he is putting in jeopardy! A girl like Nancy—with her money! And one like Elise—with none! And then, dear Jock, everything will end happily—thanks for your very important assistance. See that she starts at once!

"Of course, this absurd rumour which has been telegraphed all over the world concerning Nan's latest escapade is perfectly plain to me. It was *you* who went to the Horse Show with Nan and were hurt—not very badly, I hope. What other reason could there be for your presence? It was to be expected, I suppose, that the newspapers would be mean to Nancy and revive the Porphory affair. The cable about Cawdor's renunciation of Nancy was a lie! But I have no doubt that you have by this time set it right on your side of the Atlantic, as I have on this side. I have simply said it was *you!* See that the public knows this. Nancy's reputation must be cleared. I would not worry a minute about this had not Cawdor undertaken to intimate that she was hardly the girl for a clergyman of the Church to marry under the circumstances, and that the bishop might object. And thereupon that cable was sent. I have undertaken that the bishop will not object, and have had the newspapers publish their betrothal. So there!

"But since it is your fault—remember that I left her in your care, and you were to account for her to me—

you must see that Nancy is set right before the world, and that you take the blame—if you have not already done so. That is what you are for. Even if it wasn't you who was with her, say that it was. Deny that it was Porphory—even if it was. Publish the fact that you are cousins—*first*, not second cousins. Let the newspapers have the story. If you go about it right, they will think they have a beat, and do it just as you wish. That is what I have done over here—and with success, as you will see by the clippings enclosed. You will observe that I have set the whole world laughing at Porphory, and adoring and wanting to meet Nancy. You will notice that one of the newspapers calls her the American Diana! So that instead of being an injury to her socially, it will give her an actual cachet! Hurry her over here. Why, she could take her choice of the nobility now. Put yourself right into it—and Porphory out of it. Make light of it. Make it a joke. And put the joke on Porphory. Make him ridiculous. That is the only way—for him. Say that the trick was cooked up by Nancy and you to get rid of him. But, a word of warning. You know how Nancy is. If she makes up her mind to be 'dishonoured'—that word has crossed the ocean and is giving no end of amusement to people—she *will* be dishonoured. See that she does not undo it all by denying your story.

"I neglected to say that even before I started to Europe, Cawdor had several times written to hurry me. You may have wondered why I delayed my going from time to time. Well, that was one reason. I am not used to being hurried—even by Cawdor. Before coming I had no idea what it could be about—he was so urgent. But now I have reason to believe that it is something silly concerning Miss Murgatroyd. I shall leave you to fancy what it may be. I fancy nothing. He knows his duty and shall do it. Oh, he'll be pleased enough to do it when he sees our Nancy. However, I have, by one means and another, prevented him from making his communication, and intend to do so till Nancy arrives—just to tease him, Jock dear. After that I do not think he will have anything to communicate—though Miss

Murgatroyd may. I think you must recall what I said once about marriage. I do not wish to discourage you, but I have in this, as well as other matters, reason to repeat that—perhaps not so forcibly.

" The other reason was, frankly, Mr. Peuter.

" PS.—Mr. Peuter, as you no doubt know, has abandoned his trip to Europe. I had delayed a little, hoping to have his company. I trust that he has not abandoned you, and that he is keeping his promise to advance you as rapidly as the proprieties of the banking business will permit. I confess that I am somewhat disappointed in him—entirely on your account. It would be sweet, indeed, if you could accompany Nancy over. I am quite sure that if you ask Mr. Peuter for leave, he will grant it. Think seriously of this. Or perhaps *he* might go with Nancy, if you should suggest it. My influence with him—Mr. Peuter—has, I am sure, not yet entirely waned.

" Although, I do not hesitate to confess to you, dear Jock, that I am disappointed—very much disappointed. Ah, well! That seems the lot of us all. But me especially. Nancy—Cawdor—Peuter—even you—once in a while. I suppose Mr. Peuter has been thinking in my absence and has discovered that I am an old woman. Well, I suppose I am. But is there no happiness for an old woman? But I am not old, Jock. No one is who is happy. That is all I need. You have never said so. You have never said or done a nasty thing to me, dear, dear Jock! Why, as I think of it, what a good, sweet fellow you are!—better than all the rest of them. Somehow, I turn to you in preference to them all. And I now have a vague consciousness that you have been shabbily treated, and that Nancy is right when she says that there is no one like you. May I say that my little experience has enlightened me? I have wondered, since I came over here and saw how lightly Cawdor regards the obligations of betrothal and the divine institution of marriage, the Church, and everything but tennis, whether there was not a little affection between you and my dear Nancy. Jock, if I thought that was

true, you should have her! Yes: I am beginning to think she is the last person in the world for Cawdor's wife. And you manage her splendidly. Cawdor will owe her to you. How I have run on! I can't get rid of that idea since it started. I want you to write me at once—*cable!* If you love Nancy and she loves you—as I half suspect—Cawdor shall not see her! She shall not come over here for him who does not want her as much as he ought, but she shall stay right there and marry you! Cable me the facts at once, whatever they are. I now want *you* to have Nancy."

"De mortuis," said I, thinking, with a little smile, of Nan's apocryphal Latin, "nihil nisi bonum!"

LXXVI

THIS WAS MY CABLE: "NAN DOES NOT LOVE ME"

"I HAVE had the newspapers publish their betrothal!" And I was to do the same!

I was to take the place of Count Porphory in the affair—whom I had meant to kill for it! I was to hurry Nan to Europe to marry Cawdor—unless I could cable that I loved Nan and she loved me! I was to make a joke of it! Good God! I was to say, and act upon the saying, that it was all my fault. I was to be Nan's cousin—her first cousin—so that I could be nothing else! I was to send Peuter to Europe that Aunt Izzy might be happy!

And I? Who would make me happy?

Nan was to be saved once more. Aunt Izzy was to be saved again. Even President Peuter was to owe his salvation to me! Who would "save" me!

And I was to cable the facts!

I did all but that. At that something within writhed and then broke. I sobbed! Pardon them! They were a man's tears! I was tired at the end—oh, God, how tired I was! And the day was not much more than half gone!

Then a saying of Christ came into my tired head:

"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto : : . these . : : ye have done it unto Me."

Oh, there *was* a certain glory in knowing that I could make all the others happy.

How distressingly simple Fate had made it! I had wondered once whether Nan loved me. Once I was

not sure that I loved her! It was my duty—my honourable commission—to bring about Nan's union with Cawdor. But this duty had warred more and more with my own desires—until, on that day in Nan's boudoir, duty had been all but vanquished.

And, since then, duty—Cawdor—all but myself, Nan, had been forgotten! Well—Fate had come—as it always does—with a grim humour, and in an instant had resolved all these terrors and vexations. My soul's question concerning Nan had been answered. The one concerning myself had been answered. Nan had not only been saved—she had been dedicated to Cawdor! I was not only obliged to do my duty—I was prevented from doing anything else. Duty had triumphed. Desire had been slain by the car-wheels.

Nevertheless, my fate had its splendour—its peace and content. Now I knew. It was finished!

True, the knowledge made the world a void to me. But—I knew—alas! Alas, it was finished!

My brain constantly sang this—like a drear refrain: "Do you suppose she would love him with a broken face? . . . And, oh, horrors! Suppose, further, that he had met with his accident in some kind of a rescue of *her*. . . . Then she would feel that she *had* to love him! And suppose she couldn't! absolutely couldn't! You know one *can't* do some things—no matter how much one may try! . . . Do you think she could keep him deceived? . . . We only pitied him a little. . . . But—*do* you think that the frivolous woman could love the serious man—with a broken face? I don't. Good-night."

* * * * *

All that Aunt Izzy asked—more, for I, too, burned my bridges behind me and gave good measure—I did in that hurtling, aching day!

* * * * *

I saw early the next morning the "true" story of the "elopement" blazoned in all the newspapers. I was the "hero" of it. It was no elopement, but a little trip to the Horse Show, which had ended in an accident. That was all of the real story—accord-

ing to the newspapers. But Count Porphory had seized the opportunity to be *en evidence*—as always—and, in brief, had only succeeded in imperilling a young woman's good name for a few weeks, which the recovery of her handsome cousin, Mr. John Merival, had effectually cleared. The thing ended with comical allusions to Count Porphory's potteries, and him toiling at a potter's wheel, and announced the immediate marriage of Nan to Cawdor.

Horrid lies which it hurt my soul to tell!

And this was my cable—I had now the courage to send it—

"Nan does *not* love me."

And now I might read that letter of Nan's.

It had, quite as I had planned, gone to the Dead Letter Office. But, as I had not planned, it had come straight back to me. And on this day! Fate had once more set her hand hard against my wounded face.

LXXVII

NAN'S LETTER—WHICH WAS DEAD

"JOCK dear, this letter is written and mailed just before the telegram is sent. You will not get it till after. That is my intention. Then, if you come for me, as I am quite sure you will, and take me, as I am again quite sure you will, we will read it together, and, I hope, laugh over it—or cry—and enjoy the bewilderment of the world. If not, I shall ask you—by telegraph—not to open nor read it, but to destroy it. I am sure that you will do this.

"Jock, I love you—not a little, but with all my heart. I have loved you ever since I could remember. But when we grew up you went away from me, and nothing that I could do would bring you back. I had too much money. You too much pride. God knows, Jock dear, I did all I could to tell you this for years and years. But you could not understand. At last I thought that you would not—that you did not care. And it was this which made me what I am. So, in a sense, you are responsible for the very things in me you dislike.

"But I know better now. I know that you love me. That you have always loved me. I know that you kept away from me at first, when you were sixteen, because some one called you a poor relation, told you that I was rich and somebody, and that you were poor and nobody. We both know that it should have been reversed. That might have been cured. At least it pleases me to think so. But I would not cure it because

I liked it. I liked you to hate me for that. But to a man like you, Jock, the point of honour involved in my infant betrothal was insuperable. It was—it is—only foolish—in these days to agree to marry two children who, when they become of an age to marry, may hate one another. But you did not think so, and I loved you the more for it. Cawdor's whole career depended upon my money—which was as much his and yours as mine. I and it and you—everybody and thing—was so dedicated. I felt bound by this myself, and I loved to know that you were man enough at sixteen to be bound by it. I do not see why it should not have been yours as well as his—or mine—save in that you were one degree farther removed—under the will of our ancestor. It never pleased me that everything was bent to give a career to Cawdor and nothing to give you one. But of course on that subject my mouth was closed. Our intercourse was free—but your pride prevented it from being free on that matter—or any other involving your person. And all this made me love you more. I knew of no man but you who was so almost foolishly regardful of his personal honour. Women have no honour. But they adore it in men.

"Jock, I will not be sold! I will not sacrifice your happiness and my own—for this! It may be a madness you will *not* approve. I am quite sure you would not—in advance. That is why I do it without your approval, trusting that you will accept my humble sacrifice after it is made. You can do nothing. Honour ties your hands. I can and will. I care nothing for honour when it deprives me of you. I must have you—and, if it must be, we will let Cawdor have the money and trust to God to give us food and drink.

"And this is what I am about to do.

"I will send you a telegram to make you believe that I am eloping with Count Porphory. I am going to let the world know my purpose to do this publicly. You will come for me—save me. Then you must take me and keep me. But you take me disgraced and dishonoured in the eyes of the world. No one will want me but you.

"That, I repeat, is my deliberate purpose. Cawdor will have his excuse—which I know he wants—for renouncing me. Aunt Izzy will be furious—for a little while. The world, after its nine days, will wake up—understand why it was done—and laugh with us—and we shall be on the sea—husband and wife!

"So it is all planned. It cannot fail. Many sleepless nights have gone to arrange all the details. They are perfect. All there is for you to do is the thing I know you will do—come after me.

"Jock—you had always been sweet to me—yes. But never *splendid* as you were that day. Oh, a woman likes a man to be splendid! Now I want you! You made me want you that day in my lair as never, never before. You made it that I cannot do without you. Oh, but for that day I might have gone on—but for that day—letting you misunderstand. Each of us drifting his own course to torment—his own kind of torment—in plain sight of each other—in easy reach of help from each other! God knows, Jock, a woman must learn to endure and be silent. That is her first and last lesson. It begins at the cradle and ends only at the grave. Think of my adoring you—you loving me—I marrying a man who doesn't want me—you a woman whom I could not—approve. Well—it shall not be. And something else, no matter what—it cannot be worse—*shall* be. I shall make it be.

"Would you like to know the genesis of this strange—perhaps terrible—thing that I do for us both? It *began* as a prank. I thought and thought *how* I could get to see you and not sacrifice my dignity by begging you to come—after that dreadful day. I was *so* hungry for you! Oh! almost sorry I had let you go. And when I thought of this it seemed so jolly! I could *laugh* at you! I would be safe. Perhaps *you* would feel a little foolish. But I would repent and be very, very sweet to you so you'd forget it. But I would *have* you! The ice which had formed about our dear, dear comradeship—it was only comradeship at first—oh, so much, so much like when we were children—in the fields—by the streams—would be broken and I would

see you again—as before. Then, Jock, dear, dear Jock, as I went on, Satan tempted me. I wanted you not as a comrade, but as a husband—I your wife. I had tried to find a way for you to break those chains of honour. I could think of none. My brain seemed numb. Oh, I have not slept since for it! If *I* could take *your* place! If I—yes, *I* could be dishonoured! I should not care—not for all the world—if only *you* understood! But I could invent no way by which I might take the dishonour from you—and you—might take—me—until this happened. I remembered what the sibyl had said! Do you also? That about honour and dishonour? How honour could be saved by dishonour? Of some one else? Then it all became plain. It seemed as if the very God had sent it into my mind! Ah, I suppose it was Satan! After that it was no more a prank. Jock, after that it was almost life or death. Listen! *I* am to suffer! *I!* And I do not care! I am glad! I! Oh, I *do* suffer! It is not so easy, after all, to decide to become what the world will think me to-morrow. But if *you* understand—and I am sure you will—— Jock, do you feel the temptation? Do you think how I want you? How there is no other way—none? How I thanked God when I found this one? Jock!

"You are to be forced to take what you want! Think! Isn't it tremendous! I am to give you what I long to give! What you will not then allow me to withhold! Why, Jock—my darling Jock! Nothing so stupendous was ever conceived! Cawdor is to refuse what he does not want—has never wanted—except to please Aunt Izzy, the world, and the money! Well! He will get the money! Everybody—even Aunt Izzy—after a long while, will be satisfied that it was the best thing that could be done—under the circumstances. And the circumstances won't matter to us. *You* will know—*you* will understand—that it is for *you*—and we will go away—to some desert island, if necessary, where there is no world that does not understand and will never forget. Oh, it is only the world which *may* not forgive us. And what shall we care for the world! I will be

yours! You shall be mine! Do you wonder that I am mad—reckless—why I am a gambler—playing for the highest stakes that have ever been played for—yet sure to win? I will be yours! Yours! Do you hear, Jock? Oh, if you but knew what that means to a woman! The woman who yearns and hungers—starves—for—*you!* You could not solve it. You would not. Honour stood in your way. And, oh, that was good—good! To know that in the world there was one man who loved honour more than—love. I would have hated you if—you had acted otherwise in one jot or tittle. But *I* could solve it! What is honour to *me*, if by dishonour I can have *you?* I, only a woman! And what is the world's opinion—if I can have you? *You* will understand. No one else need understand. I—Jock—I should not care! And that will solve it! Cawdor will not have me—because I am disgraced. And you will—because I am disgraced. Even if you had not this letter—did not understand?

"You will take me—you will keep me, anyhow!

"Yes—if you think me vile! *You* will take me, keep me, forgive me!

"Am I not as worth taking as Raffaellita?

"Jock, wouldn't you? Because—oh, Jock, not because I am Nan—but because—you are Jock!

LXXVIII

HERE'S TO TO-MORROW!—AND YESTERDAY!

"YOU misjudged me that day in Little Italy. It was you, you, you! of whom I had talked to them. You were my prince! But how could I admit that at that time? You had not even told me you loved me then. I told you it was Glück, never dreaming that he would come there just as if I had had an appointment with him. He went to the house—I *had* sent for him, and he had not at once got my note—and Nausicaa had told him where I was—as she did you, Jock, I had not seen him since I had dismissed him. You wronged me in that! Still—he had been there with me before. I said yes, yes, yes! But I would have said yes to anything then. You thought me vile. I wouldn't *have* you love me then. I would have confessed a murder then to keep you *from* loving me—to save *you*—since you thought me vile.

"And yet—oh, Jock, I couldn't—I couldn't go away to London and marry Cawdor, as I meant to do, after that, without first telling you that it was *not* that unclean Glück I had talked about to all my people in Little Italy. Jock! Him! Why, Jock, I saw his—their—all the Poor Things' shallowness as well as you. They were to amuse me. I made them for that. Gave them their names—taught them funny tricks. So when you came that day I *was* writing to you to beg you to come and hear only that. My letter had not reached that point when you came. It was to be a very sorry letter, and I was still at the sorrow. But I did not mean to tell you then what I have told you here—only that it wasn't Glück, and that I

would obey you and everybody and marry Cawdor—and live unhappy ever after.

"I was proud, too. And, besides, you had hurt me dreadfully, and, further, I wanted to see if you would forgive me without telling.

"I had been thinking about this sacrifice, which I make to-morrow—I had talked to the sibyl about the dishonour, and she had said that some men would not like a woman who had dishonoured herself for them, but not you. You would forgive and love me. And I believed that until you got so angry at me—and then I doubted it. Oh, I shuddered! What if I *had* made such a horrid mistake—and then you wouldn't take me?

"But then it suddenly occurred to me that I could test you in that way—with that Little Italy incident. I would not tell you a thing. You had considered me disgraced. Well, I would not explain. You would have to take me on trust. If you would forgive me for that and take me back, think me innocent, I would not need to fear the other and greater and better thing. If you could see and understand without a word—as you did for poor Raffaellita—I was safe, safe, safe with you forever! For I had done daring things! Things of which I was ashamed! Things which a smaller and meaner man than you could easily have tortured into evil. And always you laughed it out of your heart. So if you should come and, without a word, take me back—after Little Italy——

"And, Jock, my darling Jock, you did!

"Jock—you did. You cared for me *more*. I saw in your eyes that you knew that I was innocent. That you loved me! Then I was sure about the rest. I adored you!

"Thank you for the trust and beauty and splendour and happiness of that day! Oh, how *could* you fancy that I might *not* love you! How could you fancy that any woman would not love a man like that!

"Ah, my own beloved, and how could I let you go! But honour had not been dishonoured then. It had to be.

"And before I was not sure, O beloved, that you

could endure the things I endured. It was sweet that day in Little Italy. But I asked myself, Could he *live* there? With only little—me. Big he? Would I be sufficient?

"That day I knew that, too!

"You wondered why I made confidants of my people of Little Italy. And at first you hated it.

"I *had* to tell some one! I was so full—full of it! It was all my being—my life! Think of it! All a girl's life! And there was no one—but these. And, thinking you would never come there, I told it all, all, all! Yes, you were right. There was no doubt about my adoration of the prince. And the prince was you, dear sweetheart! I talked about it there, quite as I used to talk to the trees in the woods when I was a child. Do you remember?

"And that explains the Poor Things. I had to have some one to go there with me. And no one I knew but they would. And they just fitted in *there*. And it was easy to make each one think that the nice things I said were about him, when they were—not. The Poor Things were so splendidly conceited!

"And not because you love me—but because I love you—so infinitely more is why I do this. Do you remember the book I was reading that day in my lair—*Love, the Buccaneer?* Well, I believe that. If I cannot have you in honour, I will have you in dishonour—mine. And you will anoint my sacrifice. If you cannot— But that is too dreadful. You can. You will. I am more certain of that than anything else.

"Jock—do you understand *now?* And will you come like the lightning and take me? Kill *me* if you like, for the disgrace you must in some measure share with me. But come and take me first! Hold me in your arms a moment.

"To-morrow you will receive the telegram and a time-table marked to show you which train will overtake me—and some memoranda to frighten you—and make you hurry—

"This is to-day!

"Jock, my beloved, here's to to-morrow!"

LXXIX

BREAD-PILLS FOR MAL DE MER

I SENT a note to Mr. Peuter, which brought him at once. What I said—and Aunt Izzy's name was not mentioned—made Mr. Peuter determine to go to Europe, notwithstanding the defalcation of Barker, which had kept him at home. Barker, it seemed, jealous of my advancement, had determined to advance himself. He borrowed the bank's cash to deal in stocks.

"What is the name of this noble person you speak of, who is so much interested in your—aunt—er—and your—cousin—Cawdor?"

I said I did not know. This was quite true. There was no such person.

"You should be careful, sir, very careful. In nine cases out of ten it is money, sir, money!"

I believed so.

"Barker's defalcation—I must await his prosecution—and your own accident— However, I think I must. I am quite broken down with anxiety. Do you know anything about the sailing of the ships to Europe?"

I did not.

"Have you ever been over?"

I had not.

"I am informed that sea-sickness is a most dreadful thing—dreadful! One cannot eat or sleep. And it is painful, sir. There is a constant retching that is most distressing. And dizziness—and headache. I am informed that persons afflicted with this malady do not care whether they live or die!"

I said that I understood that this was one of its most pronounced symptoms.

"It is a pity," said Mr. Peuter, "that anything so pleasant as a sea voyage should be rendered so disagreeable. Science has not done its duty by the sea voyage, sir."

I told him that I knew a physician who had discovered an absolute preventive of the malady.

Mr. Peuter leaped to his feet in delight.

"Where, sir, where shall I find him?"

I gave him the address.

"If this is correct, sir, and I have no reason to doubt you, you have no reason to deceive me, I shall start in a week! Yes, sir! But for that I should already have gone."

I laughed. Thanks to Mr. Peuter, and his cowardice in the face of mal de mer! I laughed again, and found it good. This time that Aunt Izzy had been made so unhappy by this same cowardice, and was to be made happy by my deception. I thought I understood. He had been afraid to confess this frankly, and Aunt Izzy had construed his evasions into symptoms of unfaithfulness. What curious beings we are!

I had an immense joy in deceiving him—and giving him and Aunt Izzy to each other. He would be sick, of course. But he would see Aunt Izzy afterward—and she would see him. He would not die. He would forget the mal de mer—and forgive me!

I sent a note to my classmate, Dr. Everhard, explaining the situation and asking him to give Mr. Peuter some bread-pills on my account and risk.

LXXX

TE DEUM!

SO from my bed in the hospital I wrote my last letter to Aunt Izzy:

"All you wished is accomplished. Nan is saved. She is Cawdor's. I have kept the faith. She has. I love her. God bless her—and you! Do you wish to know how it was all accomplished? Nan will be with you as soon as this. She will tell you—all but this, which I do: That to make one remember and obey who had forgotten and disobeyed, to re-establish one in honour who was ready to dishonour honour, to secure to the owner the goods of which he was about to despoil him—because to forget—to disobey—to steal—were sweeter than honour—dearer than life—fate came and smashed his face! Te Deum!

"PS.—Mr. Peuter starts for Europe the day after to-morrow."

I laughed. I was free—to go away from Nan!

LXXXI

THE DOCTORS DID PATCH ME UP

NEXT day, at Nan's hour, I was on my way down the bay aboard the *Deutschland*. I was asleep—opium. There was a note at the hospital for Nan. It said that I had suddenly decided to go to London for surgical treatment. But Nan understood. And she forgave me, I know, as I asked her to do. I begged her to go to Cawdor. I sent her copies of the newspapers. I asked her to not let our sufferings be in vain—to not disturb the status of her affair as it now was before the world; and I said that I would write—write—write!

But I did not write.

The doctors did patch me up, so that within a year people no longer turned to stare at me. And I did find among strangers the brutal pity I had expected. But it hurt less for the reason that it was brutal—and I gave them brutality for brutality. It bred in me something I was not glad for, but which I knew I needed, and would need more and more as I went more and more into the world for my bread. For it had come to this—that I was working for daily pittances which brought me not much more than food. I had cut myself off from the world and all who knew me. I wanted nothing now but food and shelter. All that the nurse had said would have come true—had I permitted it. But no one had the courage to pity me. And no one had the opportunity to be embarrassed by me.

LXXXII

AND THEN I SAW HER—FIRST

AND then I saw her—on Piccadilly. She was with a gentleman in a clerical coat, whom I at once knew for Cawdor—though I had not seen him since childhood. Nan was much the same. She skipped along at his side—turning now and again to look up at him—colliding with him—catching step—catching his hand—dragging him suddenly to look into a window—once into a shop.

I dodged into a side street to let them pass, for I was shabby. I returned when I thought they had gone, only to meet them face to face. My hand flew to my hat. But they passed me without recognition. Then I remembered my face—sometimes I forget it now. With this guarantee of safety came a mighty temptation to follow them. And why might I not have this little, who asked for no more? Only to hear the *frou* of her skirts—only to smell of the violetted air—only to see the sun on her hair—ah, God, only to listen to her voice! These little things I would take unknown! Any stranger might take as much from Nan! And once I—once Nan had loved me! But, ah, the wish for so little of Nan grows upon me, and one becomes avaricious! So with me. I had to have now what I was tempted to take though the hangman's noose dangled at the end of it! I followed them home, sauntering as they sauntered. It was a long walk through beautiful streets in the spring. I was quite as gay as they were—all to myself! Sometimes I drew very close to them: I could see the

little curls on Nan's neck. I caught glimpses of her dear face. And then I began to understand that this, too, was a different Nan. I knew not quite in what. That beauty I had seen at the hospital was still in her face, still more splendid. But there was something else. Was it sadness? Or but a vast wistfulness? And she seemed tired. But her voice had most changed. Its melody was more profound—but infinitely sweeter, like a mother's crooning a song. There was a little knot of crape on her breast. I wondered who was dead. Then, when at an opportunity I looked closer, I saw that with the crape was twined something white. It was frayed at the edges, and reminded me of one of those hospital bandages.

"What an excellent thing to mortify one's soul with!" I smiled.

And so— Do you care to know more of that day on Piccadilly? Well, you cannot—until you shall walk, on a lovely day in the spring, behind the Nan you love and the Cawdor she has married. You a shabby outcast. He a clergyman of the Established Church.

It was a long way, and the money which should have bought my dinner went for a hansom home.

I kept the hansom and drove to Barrow's studio.

"Ben," I said, "could we together manage to get me a couple of pounds?"

Ben put down his pipe and stared.

"I notice that you came in a hansom!"

"I'm going to keep it and go straight to a second-hand clothier."

"Whew! Well, Barcus just paid me for that 'Carmen' sketch—seven shillings And here's two more——and ninepence. I'm done at that."

He threw the money across the table, and followed it with a handsome match-box.

"Raise the rest on that. But why this sudden thirst for opulence?"

"I saw some people to-day whom I haven't seen for—a long time. I just remembered that it was her birthday—her twenty-third."

"Oh! All right."

"And these clothes——" I looked down at myself.

"I understand."

"And some flowers."

"Gorgeous! Good luck!"

"Ben——"

"Go along!" laughed the artist. "When a fellow finds people and calls them *her*——"

Suddenly I tried to recant. "Take back your money, Ben. I won't. It'll only be—embarrassing." How that damned word clung to my tongue!

But this hurt the gayest, saddest, dearest friend I have ever had.

"Don't turn your back on an hour's happiness, old man," reproached Ben; "no matter what you must pay for it afterward. Go along!"

LXXXIII

AND MY ARMS OPENED—AND CLOSED UPON—NAN

A BANDIT-LOOKING butler opened to my ring. I had no such thing as a card, and the man was in savage doubt whether or not to take up the name I gave. I felt that he had read me through and through, and had pronounced me a sham in spite of my evening clothes. Perhaps the exact degree of my shamming puzzled him. I am very certain it saved me. For, after all, there *were* the evening clothes, and I *might* be a gentleman. There are degrees of gentlehood. It was plain to see that he had stringent orders concerning mendicants. This smacked of Aunt Izzy. The man at last consented to take up my name, but was quite unable to master its articulation.

"Say, The Gentleman With The Roses," I directed, in an irony which failed. I had to repeat it. "The Gentleman With The Twenty-Three Roses!" Now I laughed.

How much of this the man, who was evidently Italian, succeeded in delivering I do not know. But his abortive effort probably produced the intense curiosity with which I was received.

Four people and a baby were there. I recognized Nan and Cawdor, but the other two—young women—were strangers to me.

They were all—the baby in Nan's arms excepted—interested in my appearance, and amazed by my familiar—almost affectionate—greeting of Nan:

For though I had a festival carnation in the button-

hole of the coat I had hired, the buttonhole was much frayed—perhaps by our festival carnations, put there by other tenants of the garment.

"For your birthday!" I cried, handing the flowers to Nan. "Twenty-three!"

My gaiety chilled the rest of them. But Nan's dear eyes grew misty. She reached out for the flowers.

"It *is* my birthday," she said softly. Then, to me: "Who was so good as to remember it, when I myself forgot it?"

Then I saw that there were no flowers nor decorations—as there used to be at home—and that *I* was quite unknown.

Nan looked among the flowers for a possible card, but, finding none, she turned again to me, and asked, with all her infinite kindness—with that new melody of voice:

"Who sent them? Are you the florist's man?"

"No," I said, backing, hopeless, ashamed, despairing, towards the door. God knows—I don't—what I expected.

"No—of course! Pardon me!"

She was regarding my attempt at evening dress—sorry enough, I think.

"Were you not to tell? Ah, I see. Some friend of the sender. Perhaps it is a mistake. Have you the number right? Are they anonymous, perhaps?"

"Yes," I said without sense or meaning.

"Oh!" Suddenly Nan's face grew whiter—than redder. She put her hand on the knot of black and white, beneath which throbbed her heart. "What was the sender like? Had he blue eyes and blond hair?—yellow moustache? Quickly!"

My mother's wedding-ring flashed in my blinding eyes.

"Some one we all thought dead— Oh! Had he a scar here—another here?"

"His hair was—*grey*," I said.

"Grey? No, no, no! Not grey!"

It was once more the little note of terror mingled with disappointment. She looked at mine.

"He had a—*huge*—scar—here—where—your—small one—is—your——"

Then Nan's eyes widened. I still backed away toward the door. She was following me. I saw a little troubled, tired, uncertain look I knew from childhood when she was puzzled beyond hope. Then she came more rapidly—the look I knew when the puzzle was solving—closer—closer! Her breath panted almost madly upon my face. She made a little inarticulate cry. I saw the light of full recollection arrive in her eyes! Then all the glory I knew! More than I hoped for—expected!

She flung the flowers at the floor and herself at me.

The old, old Nan!

Of themselves my arms went wide. They closed—upon—Nan—and her baby.

LXXXIV

NAN'S BABY LOOKED LIKE RAFFAELLITA

AND no one seemed embarrassed but myself!

I blushed apologetically to Cawdor, and tried gently to disengage us.

"Yi—yi—you see," I managed to articulate, "we were playmates."

Cawdor and I exchanged uncomfortable grins. The young woman at his side—the rosy blonde one—laughed outright—then hid her face on his shoulder. I fancied she must be his sister. The very dark one seemed uncertain what to do—say.

"Ni—Ni—Nan," I said, "it's a nice baby, ain't it?" to break the embarrassing silence.

I tried to attract the baby's attention.

Nan, laughing almost hysterically, put his pretty dark face against her own.

"Jock—does he look like—his—mother?"

"Yi—yes," I said.

Cawdor laughed then.

"Even to the grey hair?"

I got very warm.

"Ni—no," I retracted idiotically, in the way of a man who is fatuous enough to hazard an opinion upon such a subject; "he looks more like his father. His eyes are dark."

I looked from the baby to Cawdor, comparing them.

"Isn't he perfectly *huge* for his age?" asked Nan—and all the four laughed.

When, as she held him up, I saw that he was—a perfect monster for a baby—of—

"Why—how old *is* he?" I gasped.

"Tell him," whispered Nan.

"T-r-r-ree!" trilled the baby.

I was bewildered. Hope—wonder—despair—disappointment—delight—were chasing each other through my heart till it and my brain were nigh to another catastrophe.

"*Don't!*" I begged "I—I—am bewildered—it's too much for me. You know my old head isn't good for—mi—much any more. Nan—I—Nan! For God's sake tell me! Is it—*your*—baby?"

Nan tossed the baby into the arms of the dark young woman, to the peril of its life.

"Go to your mother, Pianissimo," she cried; then, turning me rapidly about, "Raffaellita—Cesare!"

The butler stepped in.

"Her husband! Cawdor! Elise!—his wife—Nan!—Jock!"

And Nan flew back to the arms she had never left.

"Oh, Jock! Didn't something tell you? Was there not a little whisper to say that I have been hungry, hungry, hungry for you! That you had gone and taken all my joy? Oh, Jock!"

She held me off and looked at me.

"Yes, the eyes and the mouth—I ought to have known them. They were not hurt. And the voice. Oh, when you spoke something kept knocking here and here"—she touched her head and the place of her heart—"and would not be denied. Jock, it has made *no* difference—but the one I said. I have had a long, sad time to find it out. Oh, I know! I know! Do *you* understand *now?* Cawdor! Elise!—I have told you so often that I love him, but I have never told him. He would not let me. I had to write it. And then, when I could have told him, I was not worthy. I wonder if he wants me to tell him now?"

I said nothing—only because of the lump in my throat.

"Jock," said Nan, "I am so tired—so tired—waiting! Tell me that you love me! So that I can tell you—first—first of all—as I promised!"

Half crying—half laughing—was my Nan.

"I love you," I said.

"And now I don't need to tell you," said Nan. "And you cannot hate me if you love me. Jock"—with all the sudden witchery of Nan—"how *do* you spell hate?"

"L-O-V-E!"

"Try it, Nancy!" said Aunt Izzy, entering. "You always were a poor speller."

"Hate!" announced Nan. "L-O-V-E!"

"There!" cried Aunt Izzy, "I told you so!"

She was a very modish and lovely aunt now, yet with warmth and pride of herself.

She had known me at once—without a word. She stared at me through her lorgnon, and then said, with her comforting savagery:

"Never mind your face, Jock. You are all right inside. Wellington had a scarred face. Yours is not as bad as his was. It *was* inconvenient—not knowing whether you were dead or alive, and having Nancy insisting that you were dead and wearing that piece of bandage. But it was all right. I like you all the better for it. Now you understand. We all do. Cawdor *would* marry a poor girl. So there is an end of him. He'll never be an archbishop. I don't believe he wants to be one. Do you know what the young idiot said to me when I asked him what he wanted most—and after he had seen Nan? 'Elise!' Like one of those dolls that you squeeze—with a vocabulary of one word. Well, he's got her——"

Cawdor seemed ineffably content.

LXXXV

NAN TOLD ME TRUE—AT LAST

AS Aunt Izzy categoried my defects, Nan inspected me quite as frankly as she used to do when we were children.

"Jock—*I* do not understand why you are so—so terrible about your scars and your grey hair. The scars are not scars at all. Better than the lines in my face. And—yes—here is a grey hair—and here another—but—I can match each one with two."

"Nan, my dear, dear sweetheart, perhaps it is not as bad as I thought. I—Nan, I have not seen my face since the day you—eloped."

"Why, Jock!" she exclaimed.

"You covered the mirror. You asked me not to look. You said that you would tell me true."

I handed her the card she had pinned to the sheet. It still showed the marks of my bloody fingers.

"And, Jock—oh, my sweet, sweet Jock! You waited—as I asked—waited for *me*—to tell you true? To give me the other chance I begged for?"

"Yes," I said.

"It was a mighty good thing—that," said Aunt Izzy. "If you had seen your face every day—Well, you wouldn't be as little marred as you are, I can tell you. The great doctor used to say that——"

But Aunt Izzy blushed and remembered. And I do not know to this day what he would have prescribed for one's morbid curiosity concerning a marred face. Yet I, too, am sure now that it was good that I did not see it.

And I am much more sure that it was good to wait till Nan might tell me about it—and tell me true.

"Come," whispered my Nan. "I will keep my promise. I will tell you true."

With an arm about me and her hair against the lapel of my hired coat, she led me to the mirror.

We stood there a long time. I quite knew myself. There were scars—yes—but very faint. Perhaps the mist in my eyes made them so just then. Perhaps my eyes answered my wishes.

"Nan," said I, "I *felt* the scars and the grey hair. I saw them—only in the faces of others."

"Why—how could you do it, Jock?"

"It was not easy at first. I did not know how many things there were in the world which reflect one's face. But you had told me true. When others tried to tell me I slapped their faces."

"Jock," whispered Nan, "I loved you then—I adore you now—are you satisfied?"

"Yes," I said.

"Yet," mused Nan, "I'm glad you did that—fancied you were horrible, and would not look to see that you were not."

"Why?" asked I.

"Jock—we *are* a dull family. Why, then—oh—you *might* have let some one else—tell you true."

Aunt Izzy looked us hopelessly over.

"Love! Well, it's strange what silly things love does—if that is it. Take her, Jock, if you must have her. You're the best of the lot. She is not good enough for you—but take her—or she'll begin to cry again. You manage her better than any of us. You look shabby. Well, take her—and spend her money—for revenge. I suppose I'll have to give Cawdor mine. Kiss me!"

"Me first!" laughed Nan. "I've been waiting. I owe him one."

LXXXVI

WHAT LOVE DOES

"I AM evidently to be left alone," complained Aunt Izzy, with what I thought not very heavy regret.

We all looked guilty.

"After I have been taught how dear a thing companionship is!"

"Mr. Peuter is *here!*" whispered Nan. "She—she's deceiving!"

"You shall always have a corner in our fireplace," spoke up Cawdor.

"Thank you, Cawdor," said Aunt Izzy, with a queer smile. "I am not yet reduced to corners in fireplaces."

"Our whole house," cried my dear Nan, "when we have one."

"Too—*lonely!*" smiled Aunt Izzy.

Nan plunged from me to her.

"Aunt darling, you want—a husband—like the rest of us! Tell them—what love does for *you!*"

Though she whispered it, we all heard.

"Well——"

Aunt Izzy was, for the first time in her life, embarrassed.

"Since—Nan has—already done it—I may as well—confess——"

"*Announce*, Aunt Izzy!" cried Nan.

"—announce, then, my early—marriage—to—er—Mr. Peuter." The rest of us were properly amazed:

"Hurrah!" cried Nan, kissing her.

"Nan!" I chided.

"Jock!" returned my aunt, "let her alone!"

"Without an invitation?"

"I have said some foolish things in my time. So have you, Jock; so have you, Nancy—and all of you."

"About marriage," I laughed.

"Yes—about marriage."

"And men," laughed Nan.

"And girls," put in Cawdor.

"And tennis," suggested Elise.

"And money," giggled Nan.

"None of you seem able to forget—things!" said my aunt. "I assure you I am. I have made more mistakes than any of you, I suppose. I confess them. But I don't intend to remember them. I haven't time to make any more. You have. It is the way of the world. Go on and make yours—and God bless you all! I only hope that when you reach my years you will have less of them to regret and more to remember. What I am about to do will not only make me happier, but—"

"Mr. Peuter?" asked Nan, as my aunt halted.

"*You*, Nancy."

"Why, how?" cried Nan. "I *can't* be made happier!"

"And *you*, Cawdor."

Cawdor was about to ask the same question and give the same answer, I fancy, but forbore because Nan had left him only its repetition.

"And *you*, Jock."

I laughed my lack of understanding. But I would have been pleased to say precisely what Nan had said.

"And you, Elise."

She might simply have said, "Ditto!"

Aunt Izzy held her ground heroically.

"If it does that, is it not well done?"

"*Yes!*" came in an instant chorus. Then Nan ventured, dizzily—

"But how? Aunty dear—dear aunty, *how* will your marriage to Mr. Peuter make us happier? Honestly, *I* can't be happier!"

"It will make me kinder."

"Oh!"

Another involuntary chorus.

Nan and Elise were embracing Aunt Izzy: But she managed to say—

"They who think to live as I have lived—alone—emulating the virtues of some one who is in heaven—make a mistake. This is earth—not heaven. They who are most likely to make it are those who have never known real comradeship. I did not till—now. That is what we are all intended for. God meant that no one should live alone. He said it. He means what He says. And marriage seems the only road to true comradeship between a man and a woman. Therefore——"

We never heard the *Ergo*. Cesare, who had returned to his duties, brought a card straight to Aunt Izzy. She blushed like a girl, and said she must go down. But first she turned to me.

"You had better not come, Jock. Bread-pills do *not* prevent sea-sickness, and—explanations might be awkward."

Aunt Izzy laughed much as Nan used to.

"Signora, he say that-a you should-a hoarry," said Cesare, with his banditti bow. "Signora, he is-a impa-ti-ent-a."

We had a chance to laugh at Aunt Izzy, and we did it.

She blushed, and—like a woman—did not hurry. Nan came back to me.

"Isn't she lovely?" Nan whispered. "And what style! Would you have dreamed it! That's what love does—with a savage aunt—a wicked niece—and Mr. Peuter. Aunt Izzy," begged Nan, "may *we* be married when you are?"

Aunt Izzy smiled her a yes.

"It is to be very soon," murmured Nan, in my arms.

"To-morrow?" asked I.

"Jock," she whispered, "would you like it to be to-morrow?"

"No," said I.

Nan—hurt—began to withdraw herself.

"To-day!"

She returned.

"The old, old Jock!" Nan smiled.

"The old, old Nan!" I replied.

"Jock—the sibyl told us true about dishonour and scars."

"Per aspera, ad astra!" laughed I into Nan's dear eyes.

"Usque ad coelum!"

"Even to heaven!" I agreed.

"Jock," she whispered, "it was six hundred days! Fourteen thousand four hundred hours! Eight hundred and sixty-four thousand minutes! Fifty-one million eight hundred and forty thousand seconds!"

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